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My lady Lee.

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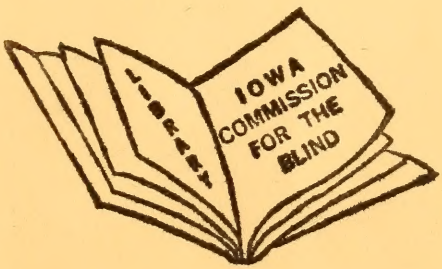

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MY LADY LEE

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My Lady Lee

BY

EDITH BALLINGER PRICE

With eighty illustrations
by the Author

New York
Greenberg, Publisher, Inc.
1925

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TO

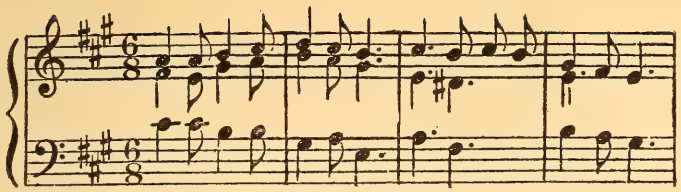
M. B. P.

WHO WILL NOT

UNDERSTAND,

AND

E. R. P.

WHO WILL.

London Bridge is broken down,
(Dance over, my Ladye Lea)
London Bridge is broken down,
(With a gay ladye!)

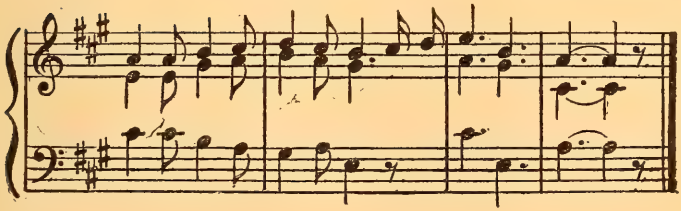
How shall we build it up again?
(Dance over, my Ladye Lea)
How shall we build it up again?
(With a gay ladye!)

Iron and steel will bend and bow,
(Dance over, my Ladye Lea)
Iron and steel will bend and bow,
(With a gay ladye!)

Silver and gold will be stole away,
(Dance over, my Ladye Lea)
Silver and gold will be stole away,
(With a gay ladye!)

Mud and clay will wash away,
(Dance over, my Ladye Lea)
Mud and clay will wash away,
(With a gay ladye!)

Build it up with stone so strong,
(Dance over, my Ladye Lea)
Huzza! 't will last for ages long,
(With a gay ladye!)

—Old Song.

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MY LADY LEE

FIRST VERSE

London Bridge Is Broken Down

I

AN old woman sat in front of a small cabin on the mountain-side and chewed upon a snuff-stick. As she did so she talked occasionally to herself, and less often kept a minding eye on a year-old child who lay in a blanket-filled box near her. The child, to keep him interested in a not very kind world, chewed also—not upon a snuff-stick, but on a bit of fat pork. This was tied by a long string to the child's ankle, so that if, in a moment of drowsiness or passing wonder at the tall clouds that marched above the mountain, he should swallow the pacifier, his natural and vigorous kick would retrieve it to begin another term of usefulness instead of choking him as it would otherwise have done.

The valley below slept still in the dawn mist, which rose slowly revealing here and there the wandering silver course of the "branch," crossed at intervals by a thin ribbon of road where the track plunged into a ford and out again to wind on toward the nearest town, six miles away. The place where the cabin stood was what the mountain people call a "clad patch," where a sparse sowing of corn and a negligi-

ble stand of dry hay made a half cultivated spot on the climbing ruggedness of the mountain-side. The valley was narrow and long and deep; the next range rose abruptly across it and stared the opposite ridge in the face. The woman who sat by the cabin door returned the green stare of the mountain as fixedly, and the baby gazed steadily up at the sky, where dawn was giving way to blue. Neither paid attention to the sounds that came to them from inside the cabin—sounds of a great conflict of pain and fear being fought out alone.

Presently another woman, tall and square-faced, came to the door pushing back a wisp of straight, damp hair with a quick, rough hand.

"She's got her baby," the woman said. "Whar's her man?"

The other pointed, looking up furtively and mumbling the snuff-stick.

"Go git him. I got my own babes to tend, an' two mile to travel 'fore I git to 'em."

The woman rose and shuffled off, and the neighbor stepped back into the cabin to leave everything "as handy for the mizzable man" as she could.

There within, Kate Kelton lay stretched inert under her piece-work cover. She was beautiful, in a way, in her white suffering. Her dark hair fell back from the still, colorless oval of her face—an oval that was too gaunt, too sharply divided by the straight, shadowed line of her eyebrows, but still splendid in its austerity.

John Henry Kelton came in, opening wider than usual his perpetually surprised blue eyes against the sudden dimness of the cabin's single room. He was a little man, unkempt, wearing always an air of being about to crumble away and

vanish unless one kept a firm eye on him. The neighbor eyed him now firmly.

"Kate!" he said eagerly.

"I was out behint," he apologized, "with the dawg. No good to holp. Dassn't to come in."

Then he went and looked timidly at his wife. Beside the rough flannel of its mother's sleeve the baby lay, a formless bundle of blanket, with only a few small wisps of reddish hair showing, even when the neighbor stirred the folds with a cautious forefinger.

"A little darter," she whispered.

John Henry smiled a little.

"Kate!" he said eagerly.

"Husha!" said the neighbor; but Kate Kelton opened her eyes slowly and looked at her husband. She said nothing, nor did she smile; not even her eyes flickered with the least expression of emotion. Her gaze was like the sudden un-

covering for an instant of the smoldering embers of a fire. When she closed her eyes again her face was the same chiseled marble as before.

"Hain't you glad hit's a gal?" John Henry demanded, bending over. "Hain't you, Kate? Or had you ruther 'twas another boy?"

The neighbor was busy putting on her sunbonnet and kirtling up her drab calico skirts against the dew.

"I'll be up 'fore sundown, ag'in," she said, at the door. "You hain't got much more sense than yore kin out here, John Henry Kelton—" indicating the old woman who rocked and mumbled on the doorstep. "Use what ye hev got, though."

John Henry did not know exactly what she meant. He "drew" his boots and sat down before the smoky fire, looking sometimes at his wife and sometimes out the door to the blue ridge and the clouds that towered always above it. Once, toward noon, he offered her some coffee and a cold pone, but she shook her head. The child in the box cradle without, however, consumed both listlessly and returned to his speculation on the immensity of the sky above the range.

Presently Kate did speak.

"John Henry," she said.

He took his hands out of his pockets and turned his head toward her.

"Yas?"

"I aim we should call her Lee," his wife said.

"That hain't a good name," John Henry retorted, turning his face to the fire again.

"Hit is a good name," she contended weakly. "Hit's an old name, and hit was my mother's 'fore she married."

"Hit warn't her called name, 'twas her fambly name."

"I aim hit should be this one's called name," said Kate conclusively, "Lee Kelton, an' don't you fergit hit."

And she closed her smoldering eyes and would not speak again, not even when the panting, capable neighbor came toiling up in the sunset to settle the Kelton family and stay a "piece into the night."

II

A little more than a year brought, apparently, very small change in the scene at the door of the Kelton cabin. The kinswoman sat on the step rubbing snuff, and a baby lay in the box. But it was Lee who lay there now, and her brother Sid—not very sturdy on his diet of coffee and salt pork—toddled in the steep dooryard, his single draggled garment fluttering in the wind. From time to time he brought his sister offerings of grass blades and pebbles, and once an empty snail shell. To these things she paid no attention whatever, though she gazed past them with deep, reflective eyes, agate gray and inscrutable. She made no effort to snatch after the blowing grasses as her brother dangled them above her, but once her hand closed inadvertently over a pebble he had left among the folds of the blanket, and her face lighted with a slow, surprised smile. She kept the stone tightly grasped in her small fist and patted it gently up and down upon her other hand. The wind stirred a little the small, soft tendrils of her chestnut-gold hair, and she gazed past the climbing clouds reflectively.

Within Mrs. Kelton was stretched, as before, under the threadbare quilt. But this time she was dying—the giving way of a machine run steadily without pause or care—and

with her the tiny baby that had lived only long enough to die. "Jest a-pindlin' out," John Henry called it—but what did he know of it? It was too late when the doctor did come. He hitched his horse at a turn in the ever-steepening

He brought his sister offerings.

track and came up afoot, his saddlebags in his hand. The capable neighbor was there, too; she buttoned John Henry's coat around him as though he had been one of her babies and put his gun in his hand.

"Whistle up the dawg an' git," she advised. "You cain't

do nothin'. She don't need ye now, if she ever did. Travel along an' git a squirrel."

And John Henry traveled obediently, not much more surprised than usual, and thinking in a vague way that Kate liked fried squirrel, forgetting that she would never eat anything again.

The doctor came out at last. He looked up at the sky and down at the dooryard and then said:

"These the other children?"

The neighbor nodded. "I'll have to take 'em. Seven of my own, but"—she shrugged her shoulders slightly—"*she* hain't no holp [a glance to the doorstep] an' he hain't the one to foller raisin' young ones like some widow men."

The doctor chose the moment to give out once more a few simple directions as to diet and hygiene—his task among the mountain folk was not an easy one—and then stood looking down at Lee, who lay smiling to herself as if she knew more than any one could dream of.

"*That* one—" the neighbor began, and shook her head. "Now look, she's a year old and a grain more. She hain't took notice of nothin'—jest lays and laughs at you when she don't holler at you." The woman tapped her own hot forehead. "Feared she's like that one yan, kin o' his'n."

The doctor bent over Lee, who had opened her eyes and was gazing up at him. He drew from his pocket a bright string and jigged it alluringly above her face. Any baby in the world would have crowed in rapture and snatched for it. Lee closed her eyes again placidly and began singing to herself, all on one note.

"See that," the neighbor woman said. "What'd I say! That hain't nateral."

"No," the doctor agreed, absently.

With a swift impulse he turned the box cradle so that the sun beat down mercilessly across Lee's face. Then, while she gazed open-eyed into the blinding light, he brought his hands close to her and clapped them suddenly and violently. The baby started pitifully, and then, giving way to a temper that had been well defined since her earliest months, burst into a roar of mingled fright and rage. The doctor caught her into his arms.

"Poor baby! it was a mean trick, wasn't it?" he soothed her. "I'm sorry—there, there!"

Lee beat him with hands and feet, thoroughly terrified at the strange arms that held her; then, exhausted, quieted to alternate sniffs and sobs. The doctor held her with one arm

"I'm sorry—there, there!"

and brought from his pocket a great expanse of snowy handkerchief with which he wiped away Lee's tears. They had collected in a little pool across her eyes, but she made no

attempt to rub them away herself, and looked starrily through them under long wet eyelashes.

"Poor baby!" said the doctor again. "Mrs. White, she's got all her wits about her—perhaps too much so for her own peace of mind," he sighed, half to himself, "but she's blind."

"Blind!" the neighbor echoed him, blankly. "But them eyes—she looks right through you!"

"Right through you," the doctor assented, "without seeing you. She can't even see the sun. She never has seen, and she never will."

"Blind!" Mrs. White pulled her apron this way and that. "Blind!" she mumbled, still in awe. "Whatever'll I do with a blind young one!"

"You won't have to take her," the doctor said, patting the still shaken baby gently. "Her father must let her go. There are places where kind folks raise up blind babies, Mrs. White, so they can grow up useful and earn their living. It wouldn't be fair to you or her to leave her here."

"You kin take her there?" Mrs. White asked, with an eagerness that revealed an almost desperate fear of being cumbered by this suddenly discovered burden.

"I can have her taken there. It's a state matter now."

Mrs. White looked rather apprehensive at mention of the state.

"Is hit like jail?" she inquired diffidently.

"Not at all like jail," the doctor said. "They'll send her up North to a big, clean, light building, with lots of other children to play with, and good food to eat, and a white bed to sleep in. And they'll teach her to be a useful and—I hope—a happy person."

He put Lee down again in her box, where she sat holding to the sides.

"You talk to her father," he said, "and take care of the children for the present. I'll come to see him myself, soon. Good-by, little—what's her name?"

The long and wearing journey north.

"Lee," said Mrs. White.

"Good-by, Lee!"

It was quite evident that the baby knew her name. She smiled rather complacently and turned toward the doctor her small, decided face, and the quiet agate-gray eyes.

"I'm sorry," he said, and picking up his saddlebags, strode clattering down the mountain-side.

Mrs. White, in a strange burst of mixed feelings, shook the Kelton kinswoman savagely by the shoulders.

"Oh, git up, git up, you pore creetur!" she cried. "It's bad enough to have *her* set there starin' at me, without you too."

III

After the task of bringing Lee north, the lady from the State Board, to whom the expedition was assigned, nearly gave up her position. The first thing she had said about the child, on seeing her in Mrs. White's arms, was, "What a perfectly beautiful baby!" the next, on being kicked by

"Take her!"

the furious Lee for attempting to take her from the woman's grasp, was, "But what a temper she has!"

She found herself repeating these two remarks throughout most of the long and very wearying journey. Lee was frightened, she was tired, she was also pleasurably excited by new sounds and places, and her excitement took the form of fretfulness. She was scornfully enraged at the bottle and cereal offered her for dinner, at the strange new clothes, indeed at all her companion's methods of ministration. Yet

even as the State Board lady admonished, she adored. When she thought herself at the last moment of endurance, a sudden contralto chuckle in the midst of the storm would bring her, forgiving, to Lee's feet. It was a very memorable forty-eight hours in the State Board lady's career, and she was limp, but still able to laugh, when she put a momentarily quiescent Lee into the arms of Miss Burke, superintendent of the Wells Memorial.

"Take her!" she said, "and, oh, yes! It'll save you time —I've found this out—when her eyebrows go perfectly straight she's going to cry (and look out!), but when she has a wrinkle across the bridge of her nose it's all right and she's going to laugh."

Miss Burke looked down rather apprehensively into Lee's face, where neither of these signals was at present visible, and said, somewhat bewildered:

"Thank you!"

SECOND VERSE

How Shall We Build It Up Again?

I

THE Wells Memorial was adapted to meet a need, rather than planned to fill one. Precariously upheld by the state in which it was located, it was also bolstered financially by the spasmodic interest of its directors, who held bazaars for it and visited it monthly with a somewhat perfunctory zeal. Originally a memorial institution with a small endowment, it had, in the course of its history, come partially under state control. But the state had nothing to do with that modest bronze tablet in the reception hall which so expressly proclaimed that in fond memory of her blessed child, Harriet, Laura Wells had caused this to be a shelter for all other blind babies who had need of it. So it was that a word of charity could cross many state lines and give welcome to Lee.

The home was lodged still in its first place of endowment, two city houses with partitions knocked out between them here and there. A sort of glassy sun-porch, usually somewhat cold in winter and extraordinarily hot in summer, had been tacked on at the back and looked out upon a fairly large yard furnished with a swing, a see-saw, and a totally empty sand-box. In front there was a circumspect iron fence enclosing a few square feet of discouraged grass, and a brass sign which stated that visiting hours were between

one and three. Not that many people visited. The public considered that blind children were too sad even to be objects of curiosity. The few parents who cared to come, lived too far away to afford a journey to the city except at heartbreakingly long intervals. Many of the children were orphans or they had been taken from parents unfit ever to come near them again.

This, indeed, was that need which the Wells Memorial was to meet. There was the necessity to garner these small victims of fate, or evil, or ignorance, as the case might be; to take them from people too poor to give them the care they needed, or too ignorantly loving to let them assert their independence over their affliction, or too brutal to be entrusted with any human life. The Wells Memorial took them and turned them over to their state school at the age of five or six, healthy and unconsciously happy. They could button their boots, and eat their dinner, and count up to twenty, and sing lustily in chorus with a good rhythmic stamping of feet. That they had no conception of a tree, other than that of a rougher and more irregular clothes-post, no idea of running water except that which came out of the faucet over outstretched grimy fingers, no notion of animals, of birds, of the sea, of the make-believe of story books—of anything, in fact, beyond the actual limited touch of their busy hands was, perhaps, beside the point. The Wells Memorial argued, and argued truly, that it is far more important for a blind child to be able to feed himself than to sit idle-handed cherishing a vague conception of stars.

Into the midst of this cheerful routine of clothes and food and undirected romping and bumps and baths and bed came Lee from the Cumberland Mountains. The routine, at first, did not come very close to her; it hovered just on

the limits of her hearing without including her. She spent her first two weeks in the isolation room, where she was ministered to by a hurried nurse-girl whose other duties were more urgent. The night of her arrival Lee passed first in roaring, then in sobbing, both of which distressed Miss Burke, whose bed was separated from the isolation room only by a partition.

Lee was, perhaps, justified. These high spaces were new and lonely; the confines of the white-painted iron bassinet were strange; there was no smell of wood smoke and frying and close-packed humanity, no crying of the wind down a cabin chimney, no shrilling of crickets in the night. Lee could have had no clear conscious impression of any of these things, but they were the sounds and scents that had been all her small life, and their absence was keenly felt about her. So she tossed and fretted for a want she did not realize, and fell asleep at last, in this new dark, with tears on her eyelashes.

She came out of isolation forgetful of the old things, plainly interested in the new, to be besieged by a clamorous crowd—all eager hands—ready to see the new comrade.

"What a bright baby!" said the nurses, who had scarcely seen her during isolation. "What a dear!"

"S'e's dear!" echoed the children, one possessing herself of Lee's stockinged toe, another of a small hand left inadvertently within range of these all-discovering fingers. Lee objected vigorously to these liberties in her usual manner, kicking stoutly and straightening her eyebrows ominously.

"Bad dirl, s'e kicks!" the injured admirer protested, and the little pushing group began to disperse, discouraged by such an unmannerly greeting.

"S'e's dust a little, *little* baby," one apologized. "S'e

doesn't know any better," and she trailed wistfully behind the nurse, who was settling Lee in one of the high-chairs.

The child was a fair-haired little Slovak with a still, patient face and a straight, serious mouth. She had a way of smiling suddenly to herself that was altogether beautiful, and she smiled now as she stood listening beside Lee's chair.

"Play with Vonya, Lee," encouraged Miss Burke, in passing, and Vonya, cheered, put out a tentative hand. Lee would have none of her, however, and intimated as much with a push and a sound of disapproval. She then proceeded to seek out the points of interest of the high-chair. Having kicked the bottom of the tray with her feet and explored the top of it with two small patting hands, she evidently thought its possibilities exhausted and sat, hands before her, frowning a little, apparently at the opposite wall.

The other children, perhaps a score in all, were organizing a rather aimless pastime in the playroom. This consisted principally in seeing how many of them could sit on one chair at a time without falling off. It was a very noisy game, and lasted until a nurse bore down upon them, swooping away the chair with a command about "not playing with the furniture." Vonya stuck valiantly to her post, smiling sometimes when she heard Lee make a monosyllabic remark to herself, and longing to hold just for a minute that small, light, intolerant hand that had for an instant touched hers.

II

If Lee had the intolerance of a haughty princess, she had also the extenuating graces of one. "Where can she get it?"

Miss Burke pondered, mindful of the State Board lady's picture of the mountain cabin. She could bewitch as she domineered, with a thousand whimsicalities wholly unexpected in a baby, and calculated to win even the busiest of nurse-girls. She was in a fair way to be spoiled, and the punishments for her frequent rages were quite outnumbered by the praises for her charm and her cleverness. "Nothing the matter with *her* wits!" the nurses commented, with an intonation that implied some discouragement over other intellects.

But her mind smoldered much as her mother's eyes had smoldered, ready to leap into flame when a kindling blast should sweep through her. In the sheltered routine of the Wells Memorial no such wind was apt to penetrate, however, so Lee sat in her high-chair and listened to the hurly-burly that jostled about the foot of it. She was curiously set apart from the other children. She was now of a rather in-between age; there were a few infants who whimpered in bassinets upstairs, and many children who ran and tumbled about the playroom, but Lee seemed to be the only "high-chair baby," as the nurses put it, and that fact added to her solitude. That solitude was really in large measure self-imposed. She could have had Vonya or Mary at her feet all day, bringing her battered toys and singing songs, if she had given them a hint of encouragement. She was beginning to talk now, but she confined her remarks to muttered confidences for her own ears, or captivating, if peremptory, commands to the staff.

No one had time to teach her to walk—if, indeed, they remembered she was quite old enough—so she continued to sit in the high-chair, with nothing to break the appalling sameness of day and week but the introduction at intervals of various bowls containing edibles. Sometimes she sang to

herself, small wordless tunes surprisingly full of melody, clapping her hands together in time; but more often she sat moveless, with drooping dusky eyelashes suddenly raised to lift a clear regard to the darkness. When one of the nurses could spare time to play with her she unbent wholly, became condescending and gracious and gave way to low chuckles of amusement and squeaks of pleasure. It was quite evident that if she could not have the company and adulation of grown people she would have none at all. But these interludes were not many, when a grown-up would materialize from the dark to fling her a sociable moment, and, for the most part, she sat with hands and mind unoccupied in a disturbing atmosphere of hubbub which surrounded but did not include her.

III

Oddly enough, it was Anne Ramsey who played the rôle of the kindling blast. Oddly, because until then Anne had never kindled anything but a rather tinderbox temper of her own. She had led the necessarily selfish life of the artist for nearly as long as she could remember, fostered in a single purpose by a judicious and patient mother who fanned the sometimes flickering flame of Anne's art more assiduously than did Anne herself.

A director of the Wells Memorial, who had seen Anne's work somewhere, wrote, wondering if she would be so infinitely kind as to make a poster for their coming campaign; the sketches of children the director had seen were so charming that she knew any little thing Anne might choose to make would bring in the desired money. So far most of Anne's publicly displayed work consisted of posters thus

solicited. Though she always fumed at first, she invariably ended by making the poster. She fumed now.

"Any little thing!" she cried indignantly. "People wouldn't like it at all if I really *did* give them anything. They've no idea what a lot of work it is, lettering and all."

But, being an artistically conscientious person, she set off at once for the near-by town to find out what the Wells Memorial was like, anyway, and what manner of babies it harbored. So it was that one afternoon she came in past the brass sign and tinkled the bell of that staid and admirable institution.

Miss Burke was very kind. She put the children through their paces: they sang *Pretty Little Bird* for the lady, and marched around the playroom, each with a hand on the shoulder of the child ahead, for guidance, and with a thunderous marking of time. Anne loved children and saw very few of them. The spectacle of so many outstretched hands and pitiful eyes touched her immensely. She forgot all about the poster, and sat down on a kindergarten chair with Vonya on her lap. Vonya, who was as shy as she was sweet, froze into an embarrassed silence nor even dared to touch the smooth, pleasant folds of the lady's dress.

"You could sing your little song for Miss Ramsey, dear," Miss Burke urged.

Vonya swallowed hard, but found herself incapable of song, and Anne thought her a bit sullen. How difficult to read the prisoned longing behind dimmed eyes which could not betray it by expression! Anne was not yet well enough versed in such as Vonya to read deeper.

She looked up, over the little girl's fair head, and found herself meeting the tranquil regard of clear, agate-gray eyes which looked, not at her, but through her and beyond her,

possibly to infinite things. Little by little Anne became aware of a mouth firm and whimsical, of flying wisps of ruddy hair, of exquisite, flitting hands that gently patted the tray of a high-chair. If Vonya wouldn't sing, this small person would. She chanted in a solemn alto, clapping her hands in perfect time:

"Hadda yitta foggy
Vooden sitta beg . . ."

"I can't think *where* she finds such words!" Miss Burke put in. "She never will sing the real words of a song, though she gets the tune just right."

Anne put Vonya gently from her lap.

"Who is she?"

"Lee Kelton," said Miss Burke.

"What?" said Lee immediately, stopping her song and putting her head on one side.

"I wasn't speaking to you, dear," said Miss Burke. "Isn't she quick!"

"Very," agreed Anne, who was slowly drawing nearer to the high-chair, gazing and gazing.

Lee had begun her ridiculous ditty once more, but again stopped suddenly, listening. Then she put out her hand unerringly and seized the bunch of silver trinkets that swung at Anne's watch chain. The premonitory wrinkle appeared across the bridge of her nose; she smiled a slow, amused smile, tucking down the corners of her mouth.

"Dingle!" she remarked, striking her other hand upon the fist that held the charms until they tinkled again.

Anne stood motionless, bending silently above the high-chair. Presently Lee discovered that the toys were attached to a chain, which she followed up, reaching Anne's neck

almost at the extent of her small arm. She alternately jingled the silver trinkets and patted Anne's cheek for several minutes, and then quite suddenly held out her arms and said, "Up-a-diddy!" in a tone so peremptory that it was not a suggestion, but a command. Anne could not fail to understand it, and lifted her from the confines of the high-chair, whereupon Lee clasped her tightly about the neck and remained silent, gazing starrily away over Anne's shoulder. It seemed to be all that she wanted, and Anne offered no further entertainment.

"She's a strange little thing," Miss Burke said. "Don't let her rumple your pretty collar."

"She's a strange little thing."

"She's not rumpling it," said Anne gently.

On being returned to her chair, Lee kicked it vigorously and wept, which, however, failed to lower her in Anne's opinion.

"She's a little spoiled, I'm afraid," Miss Burke apologized.

"I should like to take her right home with me," Anne laughed oddly, reluctantly turning away.

How fully she had meant that, Anne did not discover until she had gone home herself. Something had happened to her, something without reason or explanation, which she then scarcely realized in its entirety. So far as every other child there was concerned, Anne could have left the Wells Memorial and never thought of it again. But in her meeting with Lee had been something portentous. There had been a spark, a contact, an unperceived leap of spirit to spirit. Silently Lee had summoned, silently Anne had obeyed, knowing not at all that in her obedience she was laying her life in those imperious, seeking hands. No one could have conceived of it as a tie not easily to be broken, a spiritual bond inescapable. Anne thought she merely had been deeply moved by an enchanting and pitiful baby—too much moved. That Lee was by thrust of fate hers now, never to be torn from her heart, she could not have imagined, though her hope rushed strangely in that new, disturbing channel.

Because her artistic perceptions were keen, in like degree her emotions were strong. She stalked about her studio in exaggerated transports, and, through her tears, frenziedly blocked in a poster that was indeed to bring in money for the Wells Memorial.

IV

The studio was at the top of the little white house where Anne and her mother lived in a comradeship that had grown even stronger since the death of Anne's father early in her girlhood. Beyond the panes of the long dormer twilight now dimmed the little garden, and Anne gazed out at the fading shapes of the poplars and the rounded sturdiness of the summer-sweeting tree, seeing it all as beauty made poignant by sorrow.

"She can never see it!" Anne said aloud, bowing her forehead against the cold glass, the garden dusk shorn suddenly of half its loveliness, all because of one small charity child who sat in darkness.

Seen beauty clothed Anne's spirit divinely; color sang for her, shadow and light patterned her days with magic and her nights with mystery. The conception of life without sight rushed over her, new, immense, terrible. . . . A tiny moon balanced a white curve above the poplars; Anne shut her eyes till the darkness swam ruddily before her, and she opened them again in terror of the blankness into which she had plunged herself.

"I must give her that moon," Anne cried. "I must give her everything! Life—light—" She became incoherent and stared unsteadily at the darkening window.

Mrs. Ramsey climbed the studio stairs to see what new picture was under way. She was a keen critic and always saw the faults that Anne, in the fine flush of creation, passed by. Anne turned about, sensible even in her tumult of mind of the graciousness her mother brought to the studio. For Mrs. Ramsey was beautiful, her hair smooth silver, her eyes

the cool, quick, living brown of deep woodland rivers. She had been so busy keeping wrinkles out of her daughter's spirit that none had marked her own face.

"Is this your blind baby poster?" she asked, moving to the easel, which held a somewhat idealized sketch of Lee pathetically extending entreating arms to a presumably tender-hearted public.

"That," said Anne impressively, "is Lee."

"Oh," said her mother, "a portrait? Dear me, are they all as pretty as that?"

"By no means," returned the infatuated Anne, gazing tragically at the picture. "Oh, mother, she's wonderful! She's a misfit there, absolutely; if you could see her you'd feel it instantly. She needs a chance—beauty—life. Oh, I want her!"

Though it had been impossible to eradicate all Anne's moods and frenzies, Mrs. Ramsey had, at least, in her struggle to bring up this proud, passionate, arrogant child, been able to arm her with the ability to laugh at her emotions when they got out of bounds. Anne was not laughing now; indeed, she seemed far nearer to weeping.

"What *do* you mean?" It was Mrs. Ramsey who chose to laugh.

"I want her! I'm going to bring her home and give her all she'll never get there—at institutions."

"My dear, you're not serious?"

"Never so serious before. Why not? It wouldn't bother you, mother. I could teach her as I paint, and it would be only a scrap more food."

Mrs. Ramsey could not check an incredulous and ironic laugh at this rosy little summary. Anne, in the course of her twenty-two years, had exploded several bombshells be-

fore her mother, but never one quite so large, sudden, and violent as this.

Anne met her mother's plea as to the interruption of her own career with babblings about "painting a living picture,"

"Mother, I can *not* leave her there."

and even unrelated remarks concerning her "duty to humanity."

"It's impossible to let that vivid soul be dimmed by half a lifetime of—*prison,*" said Anne, adding nervous and irrelevant touches to the portrayal of the vivid soul upon the easel.

"You described the place as wholesome and homelike and well-ordered when you came back," said Mrs. Ramsey. "Darling, you simply don't know what you're talking about. Have you any idea of the *material* difficulties of introducing a small child into the white house, let alone the spiritual ones? It isn't the 'scrap of food'—I could easily enough

attend to that; dear, don't you see that it would be the shattering of something we've built and loved? The old order changeth—but do you quite know what you're choosing?"

"I don't see why it would be shattering anything, bringing in a third person to love and be loved." Anne snapped her longest stick of charcoal into small bits. "It would give you a new interest. You'd adore her. Mother, I can *not* leave her there!"

The immense and overwhelming prospect of responsibility and anxiety, and also the annihilation of her own child's chosen profession, which opened unbelievably before Mrs. Ramsey, spread below Anne like a living panorama seen from a mountain top. The mountain wind swept her off her feet. They talked till late without reaching any conclusion other than baffled tears from Anne, who went to bed with a dramatic anticipation of sleeplessness and slept almost at once, after writing a rather turbulent verse about Fate. Mrs. Ramsey lay long awake. It was not the first night of grave contemplation she had passed for her daughter's sake.

Lee, curled up in her clean, if scant, flannel nightie in Crib Number Ten, slept placidly with wide-flung arms, conscious of no need either for the moon or Anne.

Anne indulged in various esthetic daydreams. She visualized Lee beneath the falling blossoms of the summer-sweeting tree; she saw her haloed by candlelight in the living-room. She even drew quite imaginary pictures of Lee in these situations, arrayed in frocks that had never been seen at the Wells Memorial. All this was after a second visit to the institution, when Lee, by subtle whimsies, off-

hand remarks, and a judicious sprinkling of tears had made her conquest complete.

Mrs. Ramsey held her peace, watching for the obsession to pass as Anne's vagaries often did. But Anne continued to want Lee with a passion and persistency quite out of proportion to any apparent cause Lee had given her.

"I thought Julia Stiles was coming this afternoon for another sitting?" Mrs. Ramsey said, observing that Anne was pinning on her hat with some haste, and that Mrs. Stiles' portrait had its face to the wall.

"She was," Anne explained a little consciously, "but I put her off. Light's not very good, anyway. I'm going in town to the Wells Memorial for a while."

The closing of the door behind her somehow closed for Mrs. Ramsey more than the door of the little white house.

Anne soon found that it was impossible to segregate Lee from the eager throng at the Wells Memorial and commune alone with her affinity. Each child was, naturally, consumed with curiosity to "see" the lady, and they clung around her in a solid mass, all searching hands and shrill, excited voices. Anne, who loved them all for Lee's sake, tried to satisfy them with a tithe of her time and attention, but they were insatiable. Mary, whose bold, dark, Irish beauty had caught Anne's eye, was possessed of a penetrating voice and much persistence. Anne appreciated her fervent hugs and her reiterated statement of, "I *love* you, Miss Wamsey!" but she could not help yearning beyond, to where Lee sat awaiting her, apparently oblivious to everything save a little murmured tune. But when Anne had gently disengaged herself from all the clinging arms and won to her beloved, it was Vonya who came and stood

silently beside her, sometimes reaching out to touch with a hesitant finger the folds of Anne's skirt.

Lee accepted Anne's homage as she accepted most pleasant things—as her due. Not that many notably pleasant things came her way. Her life was built of emptiness and monotony; her mind conceived nothing beyond it, and, consciously, she craved nothing beyond. But Anne, who at first had seen in her only an unusually beautiful and spirited baby, was startled to find now and then in her face a sort of bitter resignation and sadness, terrible and unexpected in a child of two. What unconscious struggle against unrecognized obstacles was going on behind those shadowed eyes?

But something now had come into the monotony. Anne was different. She wore little things that jingled; her clothes were soft and smooth; she crooned new songs for Lee's attentive ear—which Lee promptly learned and sang back at her, to Anne's amazed admiration. She listened to Lee's well-nigh unintelligible rigmaroles intently and understandingly. In other words she treated Lee as an individual and not as part of a whole.

The first faint whisper of the wakening wind was beginning to stir the sleeping embers of Lee's spirit.

V

The embers kindled to veritable flame when Lee was transplanted to Anne's white house for a visit later. To visits, in moderation, Mrs. Ramsey had no objection; indeed, she fancied that they might have a very salutary and steadying influence on her daughter. She hoped secretly that Anne, confronted by a breathless round of baths and oatmeal and drinks and the manifold insistence of a baby's

care, might realize at least the practical if not the spiritual difficulties of her latest avocation. That Mrs. Ramsey found herself caught by Lee's charm, her intelligence, and her undeniable pathos, did not really alter the fundamental problem at all. She was taken by surprise when she saw the little flowerlike creature in Anne's arms, for not one of Anne's memory pictures of her had caught the strange and subtle mingling of wistful babyhood and mature composure in Lee's expressive face.

Lee patted Mrs. Ramsey cordially and called her "Mother" immediately, having heard Anne do so once. Anne she invariably addressed as "Mamsy," after an impatient struggle with the troublesome consonants of "Miss Ramsey." Anne was hugely delighted by the soubriquet, and, though it was obviously a makeshift pronunciation of her name, she chose to interpret it as a diminutive for "mother," in spite of Miss Burke's protestations that Lee had never heard of such a thing.

Though the apple blossoms had fallen and Lee was always abed before candlelight, Anne found some of her esthetic cravings gratified in the intervals between prosaic onslaughts upon prunes or prodigious splashings after soap. For Lee, this was all a too-exciting adventure. She felt the difference in the low, small rooms, so unlike the echoing emptiness of the nursery at the Wells Memorial. She had as many new playthings as her lap would hold, and all playthings were new to her. The very routine of bath and bed was different; the things to eat were more appetizing than the inevitable bowls of mush supplied by the Wells Memorial. Sitting at what Lee called the "pinano," Mamsy sang songs, and as long as she would sing Lee would sit curled quiescent on her lap, mouth straight and solemn, eyes leveled

gravely at space. Of all the songs—and there were many—she liked best *London Bridge,* sung to the first old tune that it wore before it became a children's game.

London Bridge is broken down,
(Dance over, my Ladye Lea . . .)

She was quick to catch what she took to be her own name; she hummed it over and over to herself, chuckling appreciatively. No wonder that Anne began calling her "Lady Lea" and even visualized her name spelled with a final a.

Lee would gladly have danced over London Bridge or anything else. She felt an imperative need of walking, and lacked only encouragement and confidence and a steadying hand, and these Anne gave her. Following the rule that a blind baby seldom or never creeps, Lee advanced from sitting moveless in one place to standing squarely on widely planted feet, giggling tremendously at her achievement and essaying Gargantuan steps, clinging to Mamsy's hand. The persistence of her demands to " 'Tandy up," was only equaled by her tireless efforts when she did find herself upon her feet.

They were at it one afternoon, in the garden, making fair progress over the greensward, when the gate was clicked open by a grave young man in gray flannels. His name was Tyler Eustis, and he was still very much in love with Anne, although she had told him that he must stop being so, immediately, as she could never return his feeling, and, in fact, had no intention of marrying any one, ever.

"Hello," said Anne, looking around. "You're just in time to see the great performance. We're coming on famously."

"Who is the performer?" Eustis asked.

"My ward, Lee Kelton."

"Your *who?*"

"My ward," Anne repeated positively. "Well, she isn't just yet, but I'm going to adopt her as soon as I can. Oh, Tyler, you can't think how wonderful it is to have the shaping of a new life all in your own hands!"

Eustis was silent, reflecting that he had been willing to give her the opportunity of shaping lives that would have been all theirs, flesh of their flesh. Because young people in the earlier years of the century were less disconcertingly outspoken than to-day, he kept his reflections for himself. Instead, he asked:

"Are you going to do the shaping, Anne?"

"Of course."

"Can you paint, too?"

"It's the most interesting picture I've ever tried to paint," Anne declared, looking raptly at Lee, who, resting from her labors, was seated upon the grass exploring the territory within reach. In the course of her exploration she came upon the toe of Tyler's neat tan shoe and fell to patting and poking it in surprise.

"Why doesn't she look at what she's doing?" he inquired. "She's always pawing around that way."

"She can't see," Anne explained briefly.

Eustice looked down again at the small figure, now busily investigating the leg of his trousers, and he whistled softly.

"Ye gods! Anne, you're either very brave or very foolish."

"Thanks," said Anne. "Mother thinks the latter, though she's ever so kind. I think she's trying to cure me with kindness."

"You admit you need curing?"

"Not at all; that's her point of view. It's the only thing that worries me, Mother's not approving. Oh, of course, I know what a big job it will be, but so perfectly gorgeous, Tyler! I'm going to make Lee a different sort of blind person—exactly like anybody else—and give her everything that she'd never get otherwise."

"Any danger of giving her too much?"

"Well?" said Anne, uneasily defiant.

"There's no such thing as 'too much' of what I mean. What's the matter, love?" For Lee, having exhausted the interest of Mr. Eustis' shoe strings, and finding herself unnoticed, had begun to sniff. The tender compassion in Anne's voice caught Eustis sharply, it was so different from the argumentative tone she had been using.

"If you'll excuse us," she said, getting up with the baby in her arms, "it's time for the young person's supper. Unless you'd like to come in and watch the exhibition. It's a

rather messy performance, though; men don't care about such things."

He took it for an indication that she didn't care about his being one of the supper party, and gathered up his hat and stick.

"No, I suppose they don't," he said. "Well, I must go on, anyway. I promised to take a trial spin with Ned Stiles in that death-defying motorcar of his. How goes the portrait of Mrs. Ned, Anne?"

"Oh, I haven't thought of it for ages," she said lightly. "One hasn't any too much time for art when one's looking after a family."

Eustis hesitated on the path. "Anne," he said, "one of the reasons you gave for not wanting to marry me was that it would interfere with your career."

"Well?" said Anne, uneasily defiant, squaring her chin above Lee's coppery curls.

"Well? Oh, Lord! Forgive me, Anne. Good-by, little what's-your-name. Run down for tennis some day, won't you, Anne?"

"I should love to," she said firmly, "if it weren't for the child."

"Oh, hang the child!" Eustis thought bitterly, as he shut the gate. He was savagely jealous, and angry with himself for being jealous of a helpless and handicapped baby. But it was not of Lee herself, it was of any motive that Anne might allow to come before her art. For she had been unwilling to place him before it.

Anne, with a vigilant eye as to the destination of each of Lee's vaguely directed spoonfuls, quickly cooled from the flush of anger she had felt toward Eustis. Here was certain peace and joy, she thought, as she tucked Lee into the

crib that had been exhumed from the attic and buried a kiss in the warm softness of her curls.

Lee did not find such peace. Her mind, surely, had leaped from its smoldering with the blast of new ideas and impressions. Indeed, the flame was so keen that it was in danger of burning all around it. Lee was exhausted by experiences; her capacity for new thought was overtaxed. She had developed mentally and physically to a tremendous degree in a short time, and she was tired, mind and body. With her weariness grew her fretfulness, and with her growing imperiousness Anne began to feel, indeed, an interference with her own career, not to mention a disturbing strain on her nerves. What had always been accounted a lively temper grew in Lee to apparently inexcusable proportions. Anne, disappointed, thought her outbursts arbitrary. No new toy met with anything but the briefest inspection followed by a roar of dissatisfaction. The piano seemed to be left as the only soothing influence in an hysterical existence. Mrs. Ramsey, with wider experience and deeper insight, hit upon what was, after all, the true explanation.

"It's just what I warned you of," she said. "A feast before a starving person. The whole wide world has opened suddenly before her. She has had so much that she wants more."

"But when I give her more she just howls the louder," Anne said wearily. Lee was asleep at last, after a strenuous day for both of them.

"I think that's because she has an idea now that possibilities are unlimited," Mrs. Ramsey said. "How does *she* know what may lie all around her in the darkness? If she shrieks, she gets a new toy; if she shrieks the more, she

may get an even more exciting one. You may have noticed how rapidly worse she's been getting in these last few days?" Anne had. "The child is simply surfeited with sensations, *I* should say. She's not unappreciative. I dare say she'll never again tolerate high-chairs and idleness at the Wells Memorial. But just now—really, Anne, I think the poor soul's on the edge of a collapse, baby as she is!"

Anne would never surrender gracefully. She made herself and every one else believe that the claims of Mrs. Ned's portrait could no longer be silenced. But neither could Lee. Bitterly regretful, Anne took her back to the Wells Memorial. It was not until Anne saw Lee among the other children that she realized what a change the few weeks had

And called, "Mamsy!" her confidence going.

made. Relieved now of responsibility, she could see again the adored child instead of the tempestuous despot of these last days. And this was *her* Lee, every fleeting expression,

every movement, was completely familiar. She stood solidly in the little smocked chambray dress that Anne had made, the center of a pushing, feeling group.

"Lee comed back!" they shrilled in chorus. "Lee's a big girl now; she can walk!" The checked aprons surged close about her.

"Don't be so near, shildren!" It was Vonya, championing her darling.

Lee pushed through them all and stood irresolute, a very small blue-clad figure in the big, bare room. She had not understood that the kisses meant good-by to Anne who stood drooping in the doorway. Lee swept her hands desperately before her—she dared not yet take many steps alone—and called, "Mamsy!" imperiously, and yet again, "Mamsy!" her confidence going.

Anne dared not answer. She must break the link now, and not renew a mummery of farewell that could only end the same way. She retreated silently from the door, her eyes hot with tears, and fled cowardly that she might not hear that small voice, all its arrogance gone now, calling, "Mamsy!" heartbrokenly into the unheeding darkness.

VI

Lee's fifth and Anne's twenty-fifth birthdays were celebrated together at the white house, for the days fell within the same week. There were cakes and candles and party lemonade and presents. Lee received two new dresses, one of which she wore for the occasion, a doll which she cared nothing about, and a music box which she ground with diligent delight until its one tinkling tune was burned forever into the memory of its hearers. And Anne's gift—from her

mother—was the permission to keep Lee beneath her own roof, and at least begin her education.

In the three years that had gone since Lee's first rather stormy visit to the white house, Anne had learned to hold her peace and keep her counsel; to drink deep of the fountain of joy when she might, and plod unmurmuring across what she felt to be an arid waste during the intervals. That she filled these arid intervals with the painting of a number of excellent and marketable pictures, she seemed to consider merely a way of passing the time.

Mrs. Ramsey, who sympathized far more with her daughter's firm stoicism than she had with her earlier lamentations, began to modify her own views. If Anne had been selfish in wishing to impose on her in her old age the difficult problems of a blind child's training and care, had not her mother been equally so in keeping Anne from carrying out a dear wish? For it was a true wish; the obsession had not passed; Mrs. Ramsey had waited and could not help but see now that the situation to be reckoned with was a more or less permanent one. She would have been surer that her disapproval was selfish if she had been certain that the carrying out of the wish would bring Anne true happiness. She could not help feeling that the almost inevitable loss of Anne's freedom and of her promising career far outweighed Lee's uncertain gain. But there entered the disturbing question, also, of whether, in the light of eternal verity, the painting of pictures, however beautiful, counted for more than the succoring of a human soul. She felt, nevertheless, that there must be many people who could succor as well as, if not rather better than, Anne; whereas it was not given to every one to enrich the world with beauty.

Mrs. Ramsey might have continued indefinitely in the conscientious probing of her troubled mind if a concrete and immediate need for decision had not come to tip the balance in favor of Anne's project. With her fifth birthday Lee's term at the Wells Memorial was scheduled to close. Her distant native state loomed up ready automatically to snatch her away to its institution school for the blind. Even to Mrs. Ramsey this seemed regrettable; to Anne it was absolutely unthinkable.

The state, on being appealed to, washed its hands of its ward in a manner alarmingly final to Mrs. Ramsey, who had sanctioned the experiment as only temporary. Anne, in triumphant possession of the official permit, bore Lee off from the Wells Memorial feeling the tingling exhaustion and elation of a runner who has won a long race. The race had been with her own hopes and fears and doubts and discouragements. She had at least, now, left them for a time around the bend, and could rest, wondering, in the peace of a temporary haven.

Undoubtedly the consideration of Lee's own personality counted for something in the weighing of the problem. She had grown in the three years from a wistfully pretty baby to a strikingly beautiful child. Her hair, warm chestnut, fell back from a face now more oval than round, lighted by glowing color. The lines of her mouth had strengthened and sweetened; her strange, slate-gray eyes, deep set beneath level brows, challenged the dark clearly. Her outbursts of temper were notably fewer, her evidences of real control appreciably more. She continued to call Mrs. Ramsey "Mother" in a manner quite disarming to that lady.

On the afternoon of the joint birthday party Lee was playing on the lawn with little Ned Stiles and a small Mor-

ton girl. It was the first time she had ever known seeing companions, and Mrs. Ramsey and Anne watched with keen interest from the shade of the summer-sweeting tree. The

Regaled them all with repeated tunes on the music box.

other children thought Lee much stranger than she thought them. She marched them off and showed them various things by guiding their hands to the object of interest, and generally bewildered them by her assumptions and her blunders. She magnanimously let the little girl play with the doll (not wanting it herself), and regaled them all with repeated tunes on the music box. She flitted about in her straight, leaf-green frock like a hesitant fairy, summoning her playmates with a commanding "Come here!" when she lost them.

"She's somewhat brusque," Mrs. Ramsey observed, amused, "but I must confess that Angela Morton comes off rather poorly by comparison so far as looks go."

Angela was fair and dumpy, and wore white embroidery and a wide sash for the party.

"My child looks rather distinguished," Anne admitted, withholding a string of delighted comments that she might have added.

The mothers of the two guests appeared later to gather in their offspring, and Anne was made keenly aware of

"Poor little thing!" said Mrs. Ned.

something Miss Burke had said to her. That good lady, really sorry to say good-by to her charge, had kept Anne a moment on the threshold of the Wells Memorial.

"I've no fear that *you'll* spoil her," she had said, "but you'll have a hard time saving her from your friends."

"Poor little thing!" said Mrs. Ned Stiles now, kneeling before Lee on the grass. "*Poor* little dear! Oh, Anne, but isn't she simply *too* adorable?"

Anne reddened slowly and turned Lee away from Mrs. Ned.

"Run off, sweetheart, and see if you can find a flower for Mrs. Stiles."

Lee, whose sense of direction had always been accurate and well developed, made off without hesitation and was soon fumbling about among the flower-beds.

"Oh, isn't that *wonderful?*" Mrs. Morton exclaimed. "How *does* she know, poor little darling!"

"For mercy's sake, don't let her hear you," Anne protested in a hasty undertone. "She has quite a good enough opinion of herself already. She's not a poor little thing, or certainly she doesn't know it. She'll find out that everybody thinks so quite soon enough."

Anne, during the last three years, had given a great deal of serious consideration to the psychology, not only of the blind, but of that great carelessly thinking mass, the general public. She had reached the conclusion that most people maintained three wrong attitudes toward the blind. Two of them the young mothers had just now put into spontaneous words:

"Poor little thing!" and "Isn't it wonderful!" The third was, "Oh, they can't *do* anything; they can't see."

A blind person, Anne thought, hearing these things constantly, would presently accept them as true and fall into an attitude of self-pity, self-conceit, and self-distrust, terrible in its effect. And the difficult part of it all seemed to be that each of the statements was true in a way. Anne, watching Lee poking among the borders, felt the meaning of the word "guardian" stretching to boundless proportions.

"Please, oh, please," she begged, "treat her just like your Ned and Angela!"

So that when Lee came back with a bright flower apiece and stuck them out at the ladies in more or less the right direction, remarking, "Here!" they answered her with studied nonchalance.

"Thank you, dear!"

"Thank you *very* much," Mrs. Morton added. "Isn't it a pretty flower, too?" and then bit her lip with a muffled, "Oh, dear!" and a blank look at Anne.

"Of *course* it's a pretty flower!" Anne agreed, seizing Lee and steering her fingers down the stem of the plant. "Look, love, it has nice green leaves, and the flower is pink here and yellow in the middle."

She tickled Lee's nose with it and released her.

"Pink flowers is nice," Lee stated positively, "but silver ones is much nicer." And she galloped off to find Ned and Angela and show them the flower, leaving their mothers staring after her in confessed astonishment.

VII

Lee settled into the ménage of the white house with a matter-of-fact acceptance that was rather surprising, considering her very limited experience. She spoke of the Wells Memorial as "over there" and unfailingly referred to the white house as "home," to Anne's delight and Mrs. Ramsey's slight discomfiture. Indeed, the ménage required more adjustment than did Lee. Its leisurely course was severely recast into a rigid schedule of naps and exercise and porridge and baths quite exhausting to Mrs. Ramsey and Anne in its regularity.

"Dear me," Mrs. Ramsey said, discovering her daughter reading Holt assiduously, "I didn't bring you up by any

such rule of thumb. She's not a baby, you know; she'll not die if you take your eye off that book for a minute."

So little by little Anne did become less like a staff of nurses and more like a mother, and reaped great joyance thereby.

They walked in the lanes around the white house, and Lee found crooked sticks to poke with, and raspberries if Mamsy showed her where, and balanced thrillingly on top of flat stone walls, holding Mamsy's hand tight and giggling ecstatically. She jumped off the wall—and that was flying. Of course the ground might be miles away. She was a bird, a sing-bird on top of the sky. Then Mamsy's arms caught her close, and that was the nicest part of all.

Balanced thrillingly on top of stone walls.

On stormy days she played with blocks in a corner of the studio, erecting skewed structures which her last cautious addition invariably sent clattering, to her mingled annoy-

ance and amusement; or she strung festive chains of beads with which she adorned herself and Mamsy. The best time came when Mamsy said it was too dark to paint any more. The words meant nothing to Lee except as a sort of magic formula preceding a time of delight on Mamsy's lap, broidered with songs and stories and tenderness. Of course Lee was unaware of much that made the hour so sweet to Anne: blue dusk filling the studio from the rain-gemmed panes, the flower-flame of the candle blossoming serenely on the mantelshelf. Anne often found it impossible to remember that night and day were not for Lee.

"I could tell you one story," Lee suggested, "a nice one."

"Fine," Anne encouraged; "I'd like that for a change."

Lee curled herself into complete comfort within Mamsy's arms.

"Well, once-a-time there was a little small girl," she narrated, "as little as *this*." She disturbed her coziness to indicate between her hands a height of about six inches for her diminutive heroine. "Look, Mamsy."

"I see. She *was* little, no doubt about it," Anne laughed.

"No, but *look*." Lee was imperative.

Anne conceded, taking Lee's hands in her own and kissing her into the bargain. Satisfied by the touch that Mamsy had gauged the little small girl's dimensions, Lee wriggled back and proceeded:

"Well, she walked and she ranned and there was a squirl. He had a box and a cubber on it. In there were acorns he had, and a big-big 'normous shocklit cake, and he cubbered 'em up. That little girl said, 'Give me some,' and he said, 'Not unless you're a sing-bird I won't,' and she said, 'I'll be, den,' and so she was and flied off and off underneaf the sky. But the squirl put the box and the cubber and all dose things

in a big hole by the tree so she couldn't find 'em. *That* was naughty. So she wasn't any more sing-bird and she jumped down and it was her Mamsy, and they had shocklit cakes for supper so they didn't mind. Isn't that a nice silly story?"

Anne agreed that it was. The studio rocking chair was made of crook-legged hickory, and it squeaked, but neither of them minded that. The squeak always made a sympathetic accompaniment to whatever song might be going forward, and if Lee clapped her hands in time, too, the whole effect was quite orchestral.

"Sojer, sojer, will you marry me,
Wif your muskick, fife an' drum?"

(That was Lee's part, in dulcet, beseeching tones.)

"Oh, how should I marry such a pretty girl as you
When I have no coat to put on?"

(Mamsy could make her voice gruff and funny like the soldier's. Then they both sang together, Lee's rendering somewhat obscured by chuckles.)

"So away she ran to the tailor's shop
As *fast* as she could run, [They rocked violently!]
And she bought him a coat of the very, *very* best,
And the soldier put—it—on!"

That song had lots of verses. The soldier needed—and obtained—so many things, and he put them *all* on, only to play a very dastardly trick on his poor credulous lady in the end. Lee never tired of the exploits of this unprincipled military man, and they sang it over and over till supper time put an end to their caroling.

Bed was only another adventure. Lee was a blackbird, baked in a pie, quite concealed until Mamsy should cut the pie open by suddenly flinging back the covers, disclosing rumpled chestnut locks and a flushed countenance wreathed with smiles. The blackbird, true to tradition, would at once begin to sing, and only by turning the tables and nipping off *its* nose instead of the maid's, could Mamsy persuade it to compose itself to slumber.

"Where is your face, Mamsy, I need to kiss you!"

Could Anne ever forget those small arms held wide for her, the dear mouth shaping itself adorably to meet her kiss? She felt selfish, having this all to herself, such wonder and joy. Her mother, perhaps, was lonely, downstairs with her book. But Mrs. Ramsey did not seem to feel that she should share; she sometimes paused for a moment to look on, and passed by, smiling. Possibly she had found such pleasure many years before and could not recapture it thus.

"Mamsy, don't go 'way *yet,* now. I have to love you a little teeny while!"

But Mamsy went, eventually. Then there was stillness, and singing wind that breathed in at the window and rustled the curtains, and from below the subdued tinkle of supper dishes. Mamsy was down there eating grown-up things and talking to Mother. They would stay awake longer than Lee knew about, perhaps all night. But bed was nicer if you were a little person, and sleepy. She lay open-eyed in her darkness, thinking about cosy little things, until she fell asleep, curled kitten-wise under the blue blankets.

VIII

Lee's mental pictures grew, building—like coral branches —on rejected ideas as new ones came to take their place. Anne, who was an artist, could not refrain from describing things in words of color, thinking, rightly enough, that Lee should be familiar with them as any one, even though she could not visualize them. Lee, who was above all musical, based her color preferences on euphony of sound. Pink was an ugly word, therefore it was an ugly color; silver slipped mellifluously from the tongue, hence everything nice should be of silver; why could she not have, for instance, a silver dress? But having once heard a color word applied to anything, she never failed to use it herself in the same connection. "This is my yellow sweater," even though she identified it by shape and texture. Light was the sun's warmth on her lifted face, and the top of the candle which she mustn't touch; dark, the bedtime quiet after Mamsy had made the lamp go "click." "Dark" and "stillness" were almost synonymous in her mind. It was Mamsy's gay voice crying, "Good morning, my Lady Lea!" that meant daylight, and she sat up and clapped her hands, saying joyously, "The sun is shining; the sun is shining!" whether it was or no.

But in the world of sound and touch it was sound which most interested her. Sounds of wind and rain and hissing fire, cheerful clinking of breakfast spoons, the far-away whistling of trains. She stood entranced before the morning-glory horn of the phonograph, while the early products of Mr. Edison's invention made brazen music for her ear. When Anne found her humming indiscriminately the *William Tell Overture* and the *Polonaise Militaire,* she marveled greatly.

"That's really astonishing, you know," Anne told Tyler

Eustis, who was fortifying himself against the winter winds with a second cup of tea. "A child not six years old."

"I thought all blind people were musical," Eustis said.

"Not any more than all people. Most of them like music because it's a thing they *can* like."

"You really think she's talented then?"

"I think she has a remarkably good ear," Anne said. "Come on, Lee, and have some tea. Well, that's poetry, isn't it!" she added, concocting a mixture of hot water and milk and sugar.

Lee seemed smitten with the rhythmic value of Mamsy's invitation; between bites of cookie she chanted murmurously:

"Come on, Lee,
An' have some tea!"

chuckling as she gave it various intonations.

Because Eustis's love of Anne was greater than his dislike of Lee, he came still to the white house. But it was with a sort of triumphant desperation that he noted the studio well-nigh deserted. He had never renewed his plea for Anne's hand, but he hovered always nearest among her friends, watching her with a jealous anxiety. He found her of late unwilling to talk of much but Lee, and tried his best to carry on a conversation only interesting to him because it interested Ann.

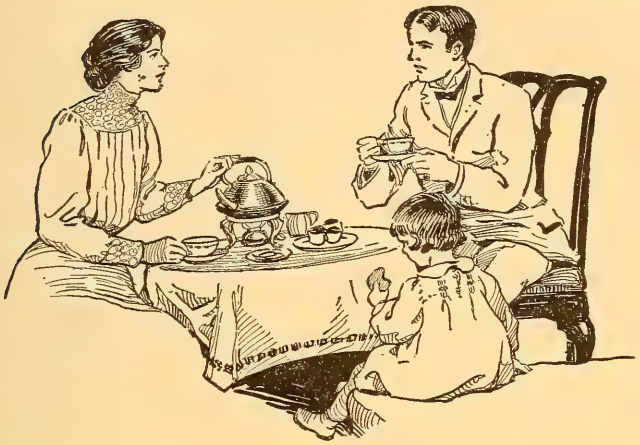
"Well, what have you really in mind for her?" he asked, stirring his tea about.

"She must show me in part," Anne said. "How can you decide what any child's career is to be at that age?"

"But there's only a limited number of things they can do, isn't there? The men seem to tune pianos very creditably.

What *do* the girls do? They can make mops and things, can't they?"

Anne blew out the alcohol tea lamp with some violence.



"They can make mops, can't they?"

"They!" she cried. "I could *see* the capital T on it! Why, whenever one says 'blind' to people, can they only think of piano tuning and mops? It seems to be the immediate reaction. You weren't set apart for the law, for instance, because you have black hair."

"That's not the same thing, Anne," Eustis contested seriously.

"I really don't think so myself, you know," she laughed. "I merely said it to divert this conversation before I grew too much annoyed with the general public."

"Am I the general public?" Eustis asked.

"A unit of it. Oh, don't look so grieved. You'd better have one more cake before you go."

It was the same evening that Lee, who lay half undressed on her bed, paused in waving stockinged toes above her head to ask suddenly:

"Mamsy, what means blind?"

The question brought Anne up sharply. Her mind flashed back over the conversation of the afternoon. So Lee had not been as completely engrossed in her chant over the teacup as it had seemed! For a moment the time-honored "I'll tell you when you're bigger," flickered on Anne's lips. Then she came over and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Blind people," she said, undoing buttons which Lee should have been attending to herself, "can't see with their eyes."

Lee's fingers moved upward and thoughtfully touched her closed eyelids.

"Can you see with your eyes?" she asked.

"Yes," said Anne.

"Can I?"

"No."

Lee's hands flew to Anne's face to discover the difference. There was none, tangibly.

From a subject vast and difficult, Anne drew here and there bits that Lee could perhaps understand. How much she understood, Anne had no way of knowing; it might be impossible ever to make her really understand. But in the stillness that meant dark, after the last clinging kiss, Lee thought definitely. So *that* was why, when she called out, "Come and look at me jump off the steps!" Mamsy answered, "I see; that's fine!" from afar, and equally the reason for Mamsy's being aware that Lee's elbows were on the dinner table without touching her. "Look" had meant "feel" to her; but vaguely, for long, she had been conscious of a mys-

terious power that other people possessed. At the Wells Memorial she had dimly felt it to be an attribute of grown-upness, something one attained to with added years and stature, for all the other children, of course, saw with their fingers, like herself. Yet, to her question, "Will I see with my eyes when I'm big?" Mamsy, after a pause, had answered, "No." Evidently, then, there were people who saw with their eyes, and people who didn't, and that was all there was to it. Lee, unaware of the manifold advantages of sight, cuddled sleepily beneath the blankets. Below, Mamsy was playing softly on the piano. Lee smiled. The music was like a warm, comfortable arm about her. Her lashes flickered and drooped and she fell asleep, thinking of Mamsy and the smooth, moving keys of the piano.

IX

The studio was not entirely deserted. Anne painted pictures of Lee, but she found that she was painting with half her mind and none of her heart. For the studio was also the schoolroom, and all of Anne's heart was held by the small brown hands that struggled, not very patiently, with a stubborn counting-frame or a mysterious Braille primer. Anne could be momentarily lost in the delight of contemplating the sun coming in past Lee's hair; wondering how best to catch it, stirring tentative cadmium and white about on her palette, and seeing Lee as nothing but a glorious pattern of blue and gold. But the pattern would break, the sunlight splinter down in a new design, as Lee flung herself half across the table to flap pale embossed pages at Anne, completely covering the raised dots with an over-zealous finger and demanding:

"Mamsy, *is* this A or E?"

The pose would be entirely different then, and it was beyond possibility to ask that any one should both study and sit still.

And when Lee laid her head upon the desk and wept, Anne must put down her brushes and wipe her hands on her apron, and go to guide impatient fingers back to the elusive words. Once, when she did that, a strange great sorry feeling swept over her with a rush. She realized afresh what she always knew about Lee, yet never quite remembered; that the quiet studio with its straight blue curtains, and glinting sun, and carelessly leaning canvases, and pleasant copper kettles in a row, was nothing—for her. A hard chair and a smell of turpentine; Mamsy, deep in her incomprehensible painting, might as well not be there but for the occasional creak of her stool or scrape of the palette knife. To Anne it all seemed so near, and comfortable, and filled with color and light. She could never remember. It wasn't very fair, perhaps, to leave a person alone in the dark to sort out A's and E's that felt just alike. With a rush of self-reproach Anne sat down and gathered Lee upon her lap. Was it easier to learn with Mamsy so very near?

"Now look, my beloved: A is way up here at the top, but E always sits one step farther down . . ."

The people who would have taught Lee at that institution —would they have tried to carry on quite another job at the same time, Anne demanded severely of herself? Not likely. She boasted that she would give Lee "everything"—a large term—and here she was doling her out a half-hearted word or so, with her mind still feeling for cadmium and cobalt. After that the schoolroom was no longer in the studio.

Lee couldn't understand about Mamsy's painting. Pictures in books meant more; Mamsy always explained them very carefully when she chanced upon them in the course of a story. But they bore no relation to the large, square, sticky, and strange-smelling surfaces before which Mamsy sat so stupidly. Lee investigated once, and Mamsy had caught her swiftly by the wrist and held her hand until she had wiped an oily wetness from it with a corner of her apron. Of the devastating trail of those searching fingers across the picture, Anne said nothing; it would be too hard to explain. So many things were hard to explain; Anne found herself shirking them. But Lee for some time regarded Mamsy's pictures as things to be strictly left alone; they made stickiness be on your fingers and were not worth the looking at. Anne, wiping the smudges from Lee's palm, felt the gap widen. The things she cared for most in life, the child, the picture, there they were, both of them, with a gulf as wide as eternity between. Lee's grave eyes rested on the painted face; Anne longed to cry out: "It's you that I've tried to put there; you with your warmth and your grace and loveliness, your blue smock and your smooth brown forehead, and the glint of light that's always in your hair. You that I love . . . you that I love . . ."

What would be the use; what was the use of anything? Lee felt her way back to the table, singing, and Anne strove to patch up the smeared canvas. What was the use?

But those moods came only when Anne forgot Lee's world and lived in her own. Because she had always been peculiarly dependent on sight for pleasure, Anne was apt to forget that life without it could be anything but a desert. Lee's world brimmed with wonders of which Anne was quite unaware, being tuned to visual beauty alone.

"I think you try to give her too much, as usual," said Mrs. Ramsey. "Too much from your point of view."

Mrs. Ramsey still regarded it as a misfit, an artist bringing up a blind child. And yet, all jumbled and strange as the images were, they did furnish Lee's mind with something concrete, and at least clothed her little imaginings with the beauty of language.

And as Anne's ability to paint lessened, in like degree Lee's ability to study grew. Mrs. Ramsey sometimes weighed Lee's achievement in reading, "Up jumped the dog and ran away," against all the half-finished pictures that were not quite good enough. But then Mrs. Ramsey was still given to doubt.

X

On a summer morning when Lee was something over seven, she lay on her face in the garden doing nothing in particular and thinking of anything that happened by. The air was sweet with a burden of sunshine. From the ash tree by the gate an oriole flashed out a swift, loud stave of notes. Lee turned over on her back at that. Yes, it was an oriole; he was black and gold, Mamsy said so. His song was clear and pointed. It was like a star. Perhaps the stars heard it. No, there were none in the daytime. There was sunshine then. It was warm on her face, and golden. Golden like the oriole. But he was not warm. His song was cool and loud, and in a great hurry. The stillness afterward was very still. There he went again! Lee tried to whistle after him. She couldn't whistle, lying on her back. That made her laugh and she sat up. The oriole flew away, a flash of orange through the garden, and she listened for him long after he

had gone. Leaves whispered; little birds Lee did not know piped and fluttered. She lay very still, thinking dreamily.

The leaves sighed far overhead, high, high. The tree must reach up until it swept the sky-roof with its branches. No, the sky was higher still, like a ceiling nobody could touch. The stars lived there at night, and the sun hung in the middle of it in the daytime like a great round fire. She flung her arms wide apart on the ground. The grass was cool and sweet; under it the earth was solid and deep. Mamsy said the earth was a big ball in the middle of the sky. Perhaps Mamsy could see where the roundness began. The oriole had gone; perhaps he was flying right around the earth and would come back to the garden. A cricket crawled sedately over Lee's hand.

"Tickle-toes," she remarked. "Stop, please!" She tried to catch him that she might look at him, but he vanished with a click when she moved her fingers. There was a stumping tread outside, and somebody said through the hedge:

"Hullo!"

Lee at once recognized the plump voice of Angela Morton, who sometimes came to play with her.

"Hullo," she replied, not very enthusiastically.

Angela squeezed through the hedge, which Mamsy did not allow, and sat down on the grass beside Lee.

"*I've* got a new dress," she announced. "Well, don't you want to *look* at it?" For Lee received the statement without changing her prostrate attitude in the least. She now put out a perfunctory hand and ran it briefly over the furbelows of Angela's frock.

"So have I," she said. "I have a new one every day. Every minute if I want to."

Angela stared. "You haven't got a new one *on!*" she declared.

"Oh, yes," said Lee airily; "it's new. It's a green and gold one." She fingered the straight folds of her smock gently.

"It's blue as anything," said Angela severely, "and *faded,* too."

"No, green and gold," Lee persisted calmly. "Black and gold, perhaps, like the oriole. If I want, it's blue and silver —or wind-color, or—"

"*Wind*-color!" protested Angela.

"Wind-color," Lee repeated firmly, "or else purple and sunshine."

Angela gave it up and swiftly changed the topic.

"*I* came over alone," she stated. "*You* couldn't."

She knew quite well it would make Lee angry. Being too phlegmatic for anger herself, she enjoyed Lee's swift and vivid reactions.

"I could!" Lee's voice was all defiance. She sat up quickly.

"Not unless Miss Ramsey was there you couldn't."

"She always is there."

"What if she went off and left you some time; then what?"

"Mamsy will never leave me!" said Lee passionately. "She never, never will!"

"She might," Angela pursued solemnly, grubbing up grass. "What if she went off and left you alone in the middle of a great *big* desert?"

"She wouldn't, she wouldn't!" Lee cried, her voice shaken.

Where Angela had no picture whatsoever of the desert or of the fear of one left alone therein, Lee, with leaping imagination, felt vast spaces about her and none to answer her

wildest calling. She fell suddenly and accurately upon Angela.

"*Stop* pulling up the grass!" she demanded violently. "Stop! *Stop!*"

It was all of Angela she wanted to stop, but the grass-rooting was an immediate excuse for battle. Angela was outraged.

"*Stop* pulling up the grass!"

"You've made my new dress all dirty!" she wailed. "I don't want to play with *you!* I *won't* play with you!"

She rose in pale indignation and retreated in disorder toward the hedge. Lee, somehow all at odds with a world that had been lovely, aimed a furious kick into space and fell down because her foot struck nothing.

She lay and wept into the grass and did not hear the oriole, who had come back, nor did she want to hear him. The cool shadow of the apple tree crept over her, and she thought dismally and irrationally that it might be evening,

and that Mamsy had indeed left her alone, if not in a desert, at least in a garden of uncertain boundaries. This was purely silly, as she knew quite well that she had not yet eaten lunch. But there was a sort of fearsome pleasure in imagining herself in this situation. She was alone and lonely, and it was cold suddenly, and she had spoiled Angela's new dress. She continued to weep.

From nowhere an arm came wonderfully about her and the voice that was love and light said:

"My dearest dear, whatever is the matter?"

Lee had to be very close to Mamsy. She had to put a wet and rather grass-drabbled cheek tight against Mamsy's, and pat her with wistful, seeking fingers.

"I was afraid you'd left me alone forever." (Had she forgotten her passionate belief and denial to Angela?)

"Silly one! Why in the world? It's not nearly lunch-time yet. Did it seem so long?"

"No. Yes. Angela came."

"Oh! Did you play?"

"No." Lee buried her nose completely in Anne's collar.

"What is it, darling? What's so wrong?"

"She said she came alone."

"Well, why shouldn't she? She's big enough, I hope."

"She said I couldn't. She said, suppose you left me in a big desert and never came back."

"You don't mean you're crying because Angela was silly? Love, there's no desert on this side of the world, and I'll never leave you."

"Never?"

"Never, my darling, my Lady Lea!"

But with the dispelling of what, after all, had been only half a fear, something else loomed larger.

"I broke it," said Lee miserably.

"The glass ball?"

Lee nodded, with a sniff. That was a game. Lee's temper was still, at times, a formidable thing to reckon with, and there had been created for its benefit a shelf full of imaginary glass balls, thin-spun and colored like the moon. And every time Lee lost her temper, alas, one of the balls went smash, and nothing could piece it together again, though tears of repentance washed away the broken fragments.

"She said you would go away," Lee explained faintly. "It made me all angry, and she was pulling up grass, and I hit her and I spoiled her new dress, and it went smash."

Anne rightly divined that the glass ball and not Angela's new dress had gone smash. She talked rather soberly about the balls and about temper in general, and Lee lay upon the grass with her head on Anne's lap, and quieted to warm peace.

"It made me so angry," she explained further. "When she came I was making a song."

Anne's secret sympathy rushed out. To have one's creation interrupted by an Angela was indeed a bad beginning.

"Can't you remember it now, or have you driven it too far away?" she inquired.

"There was an oriole—" Lee murmured.

Silence held the garden. The oriole sang again and was still. Anne sat and looked down upon Lee's face, tranquil now and filled with a look of inward listening. She sometimes was glad that Lee could not see her as she watched, for she could never keep the yearning love and sorrow from her face as she could from her voice. Lee smiled suddenly, and without preface began singing murmurously:

"The oriole sings in the ash tree
That holds up the sky;
At night it holds up the stars.
His song is pointed like stars,
But he sings when the sun shines.
Now he has flown away,
The leaves try to sing, too,
But they only whisper
To put little stars to sleep . . ."

As critic and guardian, Anne felt that she ought perhaps to put forth some remarks on technique; the day of vers libre had not yet come. But she could not. "What has been entrusted to me?" she wondered. She caught back a cry of

"What has been entrusted to me?"

defiant exultation, checked by a fear that this was, after all, only an echo of many phrases. But what, then, is poetry but elder song resung?

"There was going to be more," Lee declared, "but Angela came."

"There is just enough," Anne said. "More would make it too long. We must try to remember that one; you never made such a real song before, did you?"

"I wanted to make it for *you,* to show you what it was like outdoors, when I came in. I'll make one every day."

"I should like that," said Anne.

XI

A reason why Mrs. Ramsey had quailed before the thought of Anne's experiment was one which her daughter had never suspected—her own failing strength. She was not old, and Anne was still so young that she could not imagine the possibility of preying illness before old age. Mrs. Ramsey whitened slowly; little by little her hand loosened its grasp on the household duties that she had always made hers in order to leave Anne free. Mrs. Ramsey could herself have been a writer of some brilliance if it had not been that she had always stepped back to give the forward place, first to her husband, later to Anne.

"You're too tired, Mother," Anne rebuked her. "You oughtn't to do so much."

"How else would it be done?"

"You must let me do more."

"You haven't the time," Mrs. Ramsey observed.

Anne raised her eyes from the frock she was rather clumsily mending for Lee. Mrs. Ramsey did indeed look tired. Anne sewed for some time in silence. Her mother opened a book and tried, briefly, to read it, but presently laid it aside and leaned back, shading her eyes with her hand.

"I wish you'd try to get some one regularly to help," Anne said. "That wretched little Tilly is more bother than she's worth."

"Not enough money, my dear," said Mrs. Ramsey. "Nonsense, I can do it. I'm foolish to do so many extra things I don't really need to."

"It *has* been harder, having Lee?" Anne asked, stitching somberly.

"Oh, well, of course, somewhat. We've talked all that over so often."

"Yes, I know, but we always slide around corners and stop before we begin. I *know,* Mother; of course I can see it. I have no time because of Lee. There isn't enough money because of Lee; nearly all of mine goes supporting her."

One of Anne's moods of sudden, exaggerated emotion swept over her. She saw her mother martyred; she felt herself to be an inhuman creature for ever thinking that she could owe anything to any one but her. The spiritual link which bound her to Lee dwindled to a tenuous thread. She half hated Lee, who seemed all at once unreal, asleep upstairs, and she was frightened at her hatred. Frightened because she was afraid of finding that she loved Lee more than her mother. If she had found that, she would have put Lee away from her without instant's pause, would have killed the memory of her. Oh, all the old life, the old bond, the something lost that could never be quite the same again! In panic Anne sank before her mother, clasping her and crying out:

"I will send her away, Mother. Oh, I've been selfish, abominable. I'm killing you with this thing. You think I don't care, but I lie awake trying to solve it all, and it won't

be solved. But I'll send her away forever—I'll paint like a demon—"

"Don't be dramatic, darling," said Mrs. Ramsey, "and ridiculous. We'll scramble along somehow. Heavens, you

"Don't be dramatic, darling."

can't ship her off now. I'd miss her sadly myself. No, you passed by the time when it could have been solved, long ago. As you say, it won't be solved now. But it will work out, I know. Perhaps you'll paint a masterpiece on the side yet."

But Anne knew quite well she couldn't and so did Mrs. Ramsey. Anne went upstairs, and her mother sat looking sorrowfully before her until presently, without meaning to, she fell asleep in the midst of troubled musing. Anne had passed by the solution of the problem. If only she had made her poster, five years ago, and left the Wells Memorial without a backward look. That would have solved Anne's prob-

lem before it had begun. What of Lee's? Too far, now. Mamsy was all the world. "You couldn't turn a kitten out into the street, even," sighed Mrs. Ramsey, on the edge of fitful sleep.

Above, Anne tiptoed in and mechanically pulled the huddled blankets over Lee, then was caught against her will, for she did not want to look just then at loveliness that had cost so much. Lee asleep was, if possible, lovelier than Lee awake. There was something breathlessly satisfying; the power and vividness of her waking moods latent, veiled by the even tranquillity of sleep—a sword sheathed. Anne could never tire of gazing; the warm tumble of chestnut hair, the clear firm curve of the cheek, the straight delicate line of the eyebrows drawn with one stroke of beauty above the shadow that lay too deeply on the closed eyes. And this wonder, this loveliness, was Anne's; not of her flesh, but of her spirit. Hers to watch the growing beauty of body and soul; hers by a chance, by a slip of fate, by the will of God, by a terrible moment of coincidence.

She tried to think of life without Lee, the calm of release from worry, an aching hunger unbearable. She was mentally far away; far, even, from Lee's bedside where she stood when the sound of the doorbell tingled across her scattered senses. She caught back her tears and ran downstairs. Tyler Eustis stood on the threshold against a gentle night of south wind and stars.

"I'm not too late?" he asked. "I've been walking, walking and thinking. Somehow it's easier to think in the dark; have you ever noticed it?"

"Let's sit down out here then," Anne proposed. "I need to think. That's a funny theory, Tyler. I must suggest it to Lee!"

She was glad to drop into one of the hammock chairs on the dim piazza.

"Lee!" Tyler dismissed her with what was almost a snort. "Don't you think of *anything* else?"

"Not much. She doesn't give one time."

"You must stop thinking of her." Eustis pulled a leaf from the shadowy trumpet vine. "You've thought of her too much. Don't you know what you're doing to yourself, to everybody? Anne—I came to-night—I've never been able to believe that what you told me five years ago was final. You told me you couldn't interrupt your career. That excuse you've exploded. You never told me that you didn't *want* to marry me."

Anne sat very still. A new problem was almost more than her tired mind could meet. Yet, too, it cleared some of the old ones. There might be still another road.

"Oh, why did he come to-night?" she thought wearily. Aloud, she said, "I must stay with Mother, Tyler."

"You said that before, too. You know quite well that our house would be your mother's, always."

"And Lee's?" Anne turned to him swiftly in the faint light from the open door. Eustis sat rigid on the porch rail.

"Anne—you know. It's you I want."

"You don't want me so much that you can find room for my happiness?"

"Anne—Anne—" He was quiveringly earnest. "It's only your happiness I think of. It couldn't be— Oh, can't you see? And if—if—there were children of your own, ever, can't you feel how hard it would be for them? Hard for *her*, hardest of all for her," he added, catching at an argument to move her.

Anne smiled dimly. She twisted her hands back and forth one against the other, slowly.

"Why should it be hard?" she demanded. "'My own,' 'your own.' You're so literal, Tyler; men are, and so proud. Proud of their own things, their business, and the wives they've captured, and the children they've made. But there are so many other things. Oh, lots . . ." Her voice slipped into silence. Presently she said:

"Tyler, I am thinking a very cruel thing."

"What is that?" he asked, humbly.

"I think I love her more than I could ever love—any other children."

A small sound, inarticulate, escaped him, but he rose silently and stood in front of her.

"More, I suppose, than you could ever care for me?"

"I am afraid so," said Anne.

He bent his head in acceptance, slowly. Walking with the south wind in his face, what had he expected? He had let his thought run too far in the dark. No, useless to say anything now. Useless ever to plan conversations beforehand. Nothing left to say. Nothing that would fit. He pulled himself together at the steps.

"Good night, Anne."

"Good night, Tyler. I'm sorry."

His footsteps clicked swiftly down the brick walk into the night. Anne turned and went in. In the hall was Mrs. Ramsey, putting out the light.

"I thought you were upstairs all this time. Who was that?"

"Tyler Eustis," said Anne, trying to slip past to the dark stair.

"What did *he* want?"

"Wanted me to marry him."

"Again?" sighed Mrs. Ramsey. "What did you say, if I may ask?"

"I said 'No.' He didn't want Lee."

Mrs. Ramsey laughed a little.

"You could hardly expect him to want to marry Lee, too, my dear."

Anne brushed past and ran upstairs. "Oh, nobody, nobody understands," she whispered savagely, pitifully unaware that she herself understood least of all.

XII

Mrs. Ramsey had often wondered how she would know when the time came for her to stop; when she could no longer cope with the daily exigencies of the white house. The time, when it came, was clearly recognizable—to Mrs. Ramsey. Her daughter could not imagine it anything but temporary.

That was odd and lonely, not having Mother down for breakfast. Anne concocted messes of hastily cooked cereal and had boiled eggs every morning because they were quick and easy. Lee carried the toast and marmalade up to Mother, very proud and important. Anne carried the coffee, which Lee might have spilled. Sometimes Lee, running out into the still-dewy garden, would find a flower to put beside the plate of toast.

The end of a week left Anne amazed at the demands which the whole care of a house made upon one in charge of it. Lee's school languished. Painting was out of the question. Anne found the world a place where one did nothing but eat. Mrs. Ramsey insisted upon getting up.

"I'm lazy, I believe," she declared. "I've had a splendid rest now. I ought to be like a giant refreshed."

But she was not. The doctor came and frightened them—even Mrs. Ramsey—and made her promise not to lift a finger toward housekeeping. So she lay on the library couch and tried to read.

With the weeks grew the appalling realization that this was the close of an epoch, a definite thing; that life at the white house must be different, changed to meet this. Anne was inefficient in the kitchen, capable in the studio. Her time could be better employed earning money to pay a housekeeper than in struggling with pots and pans. For perhaps the first time she realized the full extent of her selfishness; instead of lightening her mother's burden she had added to it indeed. Only now, when the actual labor touched her closely, did she think seriously of the means by which she might relieve herself of it. Uncertain means, at that. She was out of touch with her market and her medium.

She was troubled by her clumsy ministrations to her mother; there ought to be a nurse. The doctor hinted alarmingly at a long time of this. She sat in the twilight of the library holding her mother's hand against her cheek. Her mother was inexpressibly dear; all Anne's tenderness, too long diverted to Lee, rushed out to her.

"I have such wonderful things in my head, Mother; new pictures that I've been saving all this time. I'm going to paint from dawn till dark. We'll get somebody to take command of the commissary—why didn't we long ago? I don't believe I ever knew all that you've been having to do. Won't it be fun? Just you and I; think of all the time you'll have! All that we'll read and talk about!"

"But, darling, how gay! Commissary people cost money."

"I'm going to make it. Loads of it."

"And teach Lee? How, so suddenly? You haven't been able to, even when I could be at the helm."

"I sha'n't teach Lee," said Anne, very low.

"What do you mean?" her mother asked. Anne drew her hand away.

"Don't!" she said sharply, and left the room.

There were still certain rites connected with Lee's bedtime. She had to sit on Mamsy's lap a little while; there must be one song, or a small story, or perhaps a tune Lee had made up herself. She was something of a lapful now! To-night Anne's memory flew back to the time when the chestnut head had barely reached her shoulder—one warm, cuddlesome armful. Not so long ago. "I could sit on your lap a teeny while!" That's how it had begun, that statement in the determined manner of Lee's babyhood. As if she had read Anne's thought, Lee said now:

"You used to sing about London Bridge. You haven't for ever'n'ever. Sing that now."

She pressed closer. Anne held her and sang stiffly:

"How shall we build it up again?
(Dance over, my Ladye Lea!)"

Something warm and wet struck Lee's arm. Startled, she put out a quick hand toward Mamsy's face, but Anne caught the hand swiftly in both her own and laughed.

"Pop into bed," she commanded; "I want to ask you something."

Lee obeyed, and lay straight and beautiful and sober, waiting, with her listening face turned to Anne.

"Would you like to go to school?"

Anne asked it suddenly, almost harshly. She had met the moment in her mind so incessantly that it had lost all meaning. She hardly realized that it had come. Now it was upon her. She must go on.

"I do go to school," Lee declared, mindful of the desultory and temporarily abandoned studies with Mamsy.

"I mean a *real* school," Anne pursued desperately. "A big school with lots of other girls, and teachers—heaps of them—and, oh, so many more things than I can teach you. You're getting awfully big, dearest, did you know it? Little girls have to go to a real school when they get big."

"Would you be there too?" Lee inquired doubtfully.

"Oh, no," Anne told her blithely. "I'll stay here and look out for Mother. Poor Mother, I couldn't go off and leave her, could I? Big girls go to school alone, always."

"Where is it?" Lee asked.

"Oh, far away!"

That was true, anyway. Anne felt somehow sick. Her voice did not belong to her. This was like the first frightening morning when Mrs. Ramsey had not gotten up.

"Wouldn't it be fun?" Anne went on. "You'd have so many people to play with! And so many new things to do. Music, and making beautiful bags and baskets and things."

"Can all those girls see?" Lee cut in with the question suddenly.

"No, none of them can."

It was impossible to tell whether Lee was surprised or disappointed or relieved to hear this. She looked grave and attentive and very thoughtful, but she showed no signs of weeping, as Anne had feared she might. If only her eyes could give some clew! But they remained, as ever,

inscrutable deep shadows straying fitfully across Anne's devouring gaze. Lee reached for Mamsy's hand and found it. Her brow knit somewhat; she was thinking very hard. At last she said:

"Do you want me to go to that school, Mamsy?"

Anne fell silent, looking searchingly into the small sober face, and beyond into the mind whose working she had

"Do you want me to go to that school, Mamsy?"

learned a little to understand. Awed, she wondered if it were possible that here was a spirit so loyal that her wish would be law. Ready to accept humbly; *because* Mamsy wanted her to go, she would go. Anne saw the alternatives. If she should answer, "My dearest, I don't want you to go, but I'm afraid you must," there would be tears and uncomprehending misery. But the other— Anne cowered; she felt unworthy, awed, afraid. Did she then mean so very much that for love of her, because it was her wish, this child

would accept unquestioning whatever she might ask? The little disobediences, the quick blaze of temper, were lost completely in a simple bigness of character that Anne, for all her adoration, had scarcely suspected. She felt a guilty sense of terrible false power. She stretched out quivering hands towards Lee; with infinite yearning despair she searched the grave, waiting face on the pillow. It seemed a century since Lee had asked that question.

With every particle of courage she possessed, Anne said:

"Yes, my darling, I do want you to go to school."

It was a simple sentence, but to Anne, at that moment, it meant that she would never see Lee again.

XIII

Anne had perforce decided that she must give back to Lee's native state the responsibility from which she had temporarily relieved it. Even if Mrs. Ramsey's illness had not compelled a definite decision, Anne had been reaching more and more the grudging conclusion that her own jealous and single guardianship was perhaps not altogether the best means of building up Lee's broken life. Home school, home discipline, is so apt to become personal tyranny, resented by the solitary pupil. If Mrs. Ramsey had not been involved, Anne might have prevailed on the teacher of some local primary school to include Lee among her seeing scholars. But it was imperative that the white house and Anne's pocketbook both should be relieved, and the far-away institution of Lee's own state offered the only solution of that problem.

The State Board was reluctant, but it could not deny that as Anne had never legally adopted her charge, the child was

still a state ward and, as such, entitled to the education and maintenance it offered. The papers and the formalities distressed Anne. The idea of Lee, her Lee, being a public charge at all filled her with horror. She was living in a numb state of existence refusing to think. Lee asked a great many questions about school. She could not imagine life without Mamsy; she was, as yet, little troubled by this aspect of the change.

August slipped into September. Asters opened in the garden, and the roadsides were bright with goldenrod. Lee brought bunches of it to Mrs. Ramsey, who could not now bear to look at the child. She had tried her best to find some other way, but she could not stay her daughter, who, her mind made up now, was swift and inexorable as fate. Anne was packing small frocks.

"She'll need more underwear for winter. I wonder if they supply things. That green smock is really too small to bother with, though I could let it down. Do you suppose they put them in uniform, Mother—striped gingham or something?"

She started to fold Lee's best blue dress, across the yoke of which she had painstakingly embroidered a striking design in orange cross-stitch.

"I can't . . . I can't . . ." she cried suddenly in a thin voice, and crumpled the dress savagely against her face.

"Ah, my dear!" begged Mrs. Ramsey, from her sofa.

A sort of combination nurse and housekeeper had been installed and creaked efficiently in the background. She grated upon Anne in these last days. The world was cruelly beautiful. Days of gold and nights of amethyst. The garden filled with the piping of gathering birds and the thud

of tumbling apples. Peace everywhere, ripe summer, a growing moon each night rounder above the ash tree.

"Will it be like this?" Lee asked for the hundredth time. "I mean, a garden and things like that?"

"I don't know. I think it's in the country. You'll have to write and tell me."

"Will you come *awfully* soon?"

"It's very far off," Anne hedged. "It costs a lot of money to get there. We'll have to wait and wait. I'll write to you every single day, dearest."

It did cost a lot. By a lucky chance the State Board lady, the same who had brought the infant Lee from Mrs. White's cabin to the Wells Memorial, was North again. If Miss Ramsey could bring the little girl to New York she'd be glad to take her the rest of the way. Anne longed to go every inch of the journey, but it would have been senseless to refuse so helpful an offer. She took Lee to New York.

The white house had never looked so much like home. A slender trail of violet smoke lifted from its chimney. The green door stood open behind them; a glimpse of the hall showed the tall clock, and the carved chair, and the big pewter tankard on the table. Anne described it all to Lee.

"Don't forget the white house," she begged pitifully.

Mrs. Ramsey, from her window, watched them go to the cab. Anne bent and spoke to Lee who turned about, smiling, and flourished her arm in the general direction of the house. Mrs. Ramsey lifted her hand and let it fall.

"Something you wish, ma'am?" asked the efficient one, creaking out of the shadow at once.

"No, oh, no," said Mrs. Ramsey wearily. "Please don't stay."

"My!" said the State Board lady, "I never would recognize this girl! I don't know, though; she still wrinkles across her nose when she laughs, don't she?"

She gave Lee a playful poke. The passage of six years had brought to the State Board lady a somewhat increased weight, and a pair of pince-nez through which she looked brightly, but it had not dimmed her interest in her work, which she quite rightly considered "uplifting." She dealt in blind children, however, much as any business person deals in the materials of a trade, and of Anne's present agony she guessed very little.

They were waiting at Jersey City in the great ugly structure which then served as the Pennsylvania Station—waiting for the Southern Express to be called. Not even anything beautiful at the last to picture for Lee. Anne talked mechanically through the unbearable droning in her head and scarcely heard what she was saying.

How could the State Board lady know what to tell them, those people who now were to minister to Lee? How could she know, or remember if she knew, that Lee caught cold so easily if her feet were wet, that she always had marmalade on her second piece of toast at breakfast, that her brown coat really wasn't heavy enough for winter unless she wore her heather sweater under it, that she could read almost everything in the first part of the reading-book, that her temper cooled under imaginative reasoning but flared up under correction and coercion, that her hair ought never to be cut shorter than an inch below the ear. . . .

"If I could only *go* there with her!" Anne mourned, unaware that she was much like all the others, the excited, hurried, often tearful, women who poured out a hastily retailed list of the needs and likes and peculiarities of their children,

to be forgotten by the busy matrons before the door should close. "My little girl ain't never been asleep a night in her life thout'n her dolly." "George he gets to cough on his chest terrible easy . . ." "I never did have the heart to spank her any . . ." The matrons had heard it all so many times—breathed out hastily while trembling fingers fastened a shabby valise, empty now, and anxious eyes followed a little blind son or daughter timidly questing into a new world.

Anne, childless, was only another foolish mother. And she thought now, desperately, of those little things that she might not think of the big thing, the fact that Lee was going, and forever. For a half articulate bellowing smote her.

"Southern Ex-press! Leaving 12:01! Track 23 . . . Philadelphia . . . Balti-more . . . Wash'ton . . ."

It was come then; the incredible thing was to happen. Only a minute more. One minute to make up for a lifetime.

"You'll beg them to write to me?" Anne implored the State Board lady.

"Darling . . . darling . . . never . . . I love you . . . don't forget . . ."

She could not even say what she meant. She crushed Lee against her, knocking her hat crooked. Realization was rushing upon Lee. She was struggling with her tears. Until then Anne's tears had been ready to come; now she must be gay for Lee.

"Oh, don't cry! I'm not crying, dearest. Why, it's an adventure—exciting . . ."

Her voice failed her miserably. People were pouring through the gates.

"Come on, dearie!" The State Board lady gathered Lee's hand competently into her own. Anne stood up. She saw

Lee's other hand seek wildly for one that was not there. Her own arms were frozen to her sides. She dared not stir for fear that she would rush wildly and snatch Lee back from the gate. Her last glimpse was of a face turned back toward her, a small, stricken face, with lips that shaped one word in terror.

Lee had not realized after all.

"Mamsy!"
Lee had not realized after all.
The gate clanged shut.

THIRD VERSE

Iron and Steel Will Bend and Bow

I

THE Willburg State Institution for the Blind stood on a small bare hill not far from the town whose name it bore. The square, useful, stone building had been erected in 1871 and had been very little changed since. The long, dim corridors were still illuminated by gas lights; one would even say that the same atmosphere had been preserved, at a high temperature, during the intervening years. The cottage system, which was being introduced with such splendid success in Northern institutions, had not reached Willburg, and the two wings of its single building—one for the boys and one for the girls—sheltered all its pupils. It was enclosed by a stout and formidable stone wall, and many of its windows were furnished with iron bars. It is safe to surmise that if Anne Ramsey had seen these, she would have inquired no further into the merits of the Willburg Institution, nor even stepped within the wide black doors. In so doing, she might have done it injustice; and as it was, Lee remained blissfully ignorant of the existence of the bars.

The State Board lady had found Lee a less difficult traveling companion than six years ago. Her tears flowed in alarming quantities from time to time, but through them she was faintly polite, and she scarcely moved in her seat beside the window whose flying images meant nothing to her.

She slept uneasily in the strange, jolting bed. The constant rushing grew terrible; it was carrying her farther and farther from Mamsy. Half awake, she beat against something to

She didn't look very big.

stop it, and was stilled by a rustling from above and a sibilant "Hush, dearie!"

The rushing and jolting still whirled in her head when she sat very quietly on a slippery chair in the office of Willburg Institution. She didn't look very big. Her blue tweed coat hung open over her blue linen dress and her bare brown knees. She twisted her feet in her new tan shoes, which made a faint and pleasant creaking. The superintendent was looking over papers; the house mother stood waiting, casting a look of resentful surprise at the attire of her new charge.

The office was long and high. Its floor was tessellated black and white after the rich and thoroughly ugly fashion

of the early 'Seventies. Its two deep windows admitted puffs of hot September air and two steep shafts of moted sunshine. The superintendent wrote at a heavy, flat-topped table; against the walls stood two pigeon-hole cabinets, a bookcase, and a phalanx of other slippery chairs. For Lee, there was only the squeak of a pen, the buzz and bump of flies against the window, the severe ticking of a formal clock somewhere high up. The superintendent shuffled his feet, and there was a rustle of paper changing hands.

"For your files," he said to the State Board lady. Then his voice turned toward Lee. "Her eyes seem to be a good deal inflamed. I guess Dr. Tarbee had better look at her before we let her go in with the others. He'll be up on Saturday, Mrs. Darrah, won't he?"

The State Board lady interrupted. "Just from crying," she explained. "Homesick. She's all right. Exceptional environment. Unusual opportunities."

The superintendent rubbed his chin. "Take her along, then, Mrs. Darrah."

A large, moist hand closed over Lee's and led her away. Instinctively she walked on tiptoe, lest her heels click on the tiled floor. But she turned about suddenly and summoned the State Board lady, who came to her.

"Are you going back again?" Lee demanded in a strained whisper. "Will you see Mamsy again?"

"No, dearie, I'm not going North again for ever so long, I guess."

She could not, then, even send a message. The link was severed. "North" was separated from this place by an eternity of rushing motion. She had not even learned the meager solace of the mail.

"Good-by." Lee turned and sought unwillingly the soft hand of Mrs. Darrah. The State Board lady took off her pince-nez and kissed Lee heartily.

"Good-by, girlie," she said. "Don't you mind, now. You'll have a fine time; wait till you make a lot of little friends."

Then she sat down to talk to the superintendent.

The early afternoon classes were just out. Lee heard the halting rush of feet and a clamor of voices shrill and incessant. She had forgotten the Wells Memorial and its hearty din. This woke a half memory of something that had been insistent and wearying. Her nerves grew taut.

"Girls!" Mrs. Darrah cried, and the noise sank to a murmur, out of which a few well-trained responses of "Yes—Mrs. Darrah—ma'am," rose promptly.

"Girls, here's a new little friend for you, little Lee Kelton. You be real good to her, now, and show her all the things we have. They'll take care of you, Lee, and I'll come around supper-time pretty soon and show you what to do. Go along now, all of you, and play."

For a dozen or more small girls had formed in a solid mass about her and Lee, whom they now bore off with them.

"She's little, ain't she!" one cried.

"Isn't she cute, though!" another discovered, patting Lee's tumbled hair.

"My, what a pretty dress!"

"Oh, lemme see!"

"Lem-*me!* O-oh—did your momma make it?"

"Have you got a momma? I haven't got no poppa, but I got a momma."

"I have folks! I have a sister, and a brother, and a little bitta baby brother, too—"

"Oh, lookit! She's got on short stockin's!"

"Oh, lemme see!"

The eager voices kept up a friendly running chorus; the quick, seeing fingers flitted all over the newcomer from top to toe. She stood inert, swamped in the pushing group.

She struck out swiftly.

Suddenly she felt as if she would burn up; a flooding internal heat consumed her. She struck out swiftly, hitting a surprised face with either arm; she thrust an elbow here, a vigorous knee there, and broke through the knot of little girls. Then she fled recklessly, crashed into the edge of an open door, and slid down beside it, shaken with noiseless sobs.

The girls took whispered counsel.

"My, she's wild-like!"

"She hit my stummick; I don't like her."

"She hurt herself," one protested.

"She isn't cryin'."

"I don't care, she hurt herself. I'm goin' to see."

"Go on then!"

"Go on! She hurt us. What's she got to be like that for, when we was only saying how pretty her clothes was?"

But swift and unhesitating feet were crossing the floor toward Lee; hasty hands struck the door above her head and felt down it till they reached Lee's huddled shoulders. Somebody a little bigger than Lee sat down on the floor and put an arm around her. Lee tried to squirm out of it, but it held her fast.

"Did you hurt yourself?" It was an honest, unhurried voice.

"No," said Lee stoutly.

Quick fingers brushed her forehead. "You did, too. Why you got a lump already big as an aig. You mustn't go off so fast when you don't know the way yet! Why did you get so mad at the girls?"

"I don't know," said Lee miserably.

"I guess you felt bad when they asked about your momma. I guess you miss her."

"She's Mamsy," Lee said.

"Mamsy? Well, she's your momma, isn't she?"

"I s'pose so; I don't know," Lee confessed. "I've always had her. She isn't Mother, though; that's older."

Lee's new friend pondered this explanation. "I don't know about your folks," she said. "I haven't got any. How old are you?"

"Half past seven," said Lee. It was Mamsy's phrase.

"That's like on a clock!" the little girl laughed. "I'm

more'n eight. I'll take care of you. My name's Mary Ellen. Are you going to sleep in our dorm'tory? I hope so."

"I don't know," Lee said. It seemed that she knew very little.

"C'm' on," said Mary Ellen, "and I'll show you things."

She twined her arm, little girl fashion, about Lee's waist. Her heavy, fair braid flopped against Lee's shoulder.

"You got a handkerchief? I have, if you want it. Oh, no, you wasn't crying. You're gritty, all right. C'm' on."

Dazed, and a little stiff within Mary Ellen's guiding and protecting arm, Lee allowed herself to be propelled across the smooth, echoing floor. Little by little, because her own arm was uncomfortably in the way she let it slip around Mary Ellen.

"That's right," said her patron, maternally; "you and me's going to be friends, aren't we?"

"I don't know," said Lee once more.

Before supper, as she had promised, Mrs. Darrah materialized and singled Lee out from the unruly crowd all trying to gain first place at the washbowls.

"I'll show you where your towel hangs up," she said briskly. "You count six from the end here; you can count, can't you?"

"Yes," said Lee; "I know multipicashum tables."

"Oh, *do* you?" Mrs. Darrah was surprised. "Well, you don't need to multiply this. Just count up to six. There! Now come and I'll show you your place at the table; you're going to sit at Miss Ferrin's table. She's your teacher. 'Tisn't a multiplication table, either," added Mrs. Darrah, who had her own kind of humor.

The big, bare dining-room was filling as the pupils filed in at the sound of the last bell. The teachers stood alertly at the heads of their tables. Big girls in the advanced classes, lank with the sudden growth of the middle teens, came in arm-in-arm, giggling. The primaries, in outgrown plaid dresses, crowded in together. Lee held Mrs. Darrah's hand tightly. Even Mary Ellen had vanished, lost in the conglomerate shuffling and chattering that filled the room. Lee bumped the back of a chair suddenly.

"Miss Ferrin, this is your new one, Lee Kelton," said Mrs. Darrah, and withdrew her hand. It was immediately replaced by another, smaller, and very hard and smooth. Miss Ferrin was not at all sure that she wanted the "new one"—twenty years of teaching small blind children had made her a little skeptical. But, looking hastily at Lee, she then continued to look. Her other hand, with an impulsive gesture long unused, flew to the bosom of her navy blue satin blouse. Small persons who looked like this were not sufficiently plentiful at Willburg to go altogether unnoticed.

"So you're Lee?" she said. "Well, you have a very pretty dress, Lee."

That dress again! What sort of clothes did the other girls wear? Lee determined to look at Mary Ellen's.

"You're to sit here; can you remember? Next to me. No, not yet! We must wait for the little bell."

Lee stood behind the chair. She slid her hand up and down its straight back and discovered a little pendulous globule of stickiness where varnish had run down and half dried. It was quite still in the room now except for the creaking of a few bootsoles. Miss Ferrin patted Lee's shoulder. Lee put out her hand, but Miss Ferrin seemed to have moved away. Then a small bell tinkled and there was a

simultaneous blurred shout of "Lord-we-thank-Thee-for-this-food-we-are-about-to-receive-A-men!" followed by a raucous scraping of chair-legs, the cheering chink of crockery, and a cautious hum of conversation.

Lee sat down. The chair was rather low for her, and the table top not far below her chin. She explored the strange territory of tablecloth within arm's reach, and Miss Ferrin gently removed her hand and bade her keep it in her lap. Presently a heavy plate thumped down under her nose, and she attacked the unknown contents.

"I think I don't like this," she announced clearly, after a time.

"I'm sorry," said Miss Ferrin, "because it's all there is. Don't you like corned beef, Lee?"

"I don't think so," said Lee guardedly.

"You have some bread and butter on the other side of your plate," Miss Ferrin recommended.

Lee found the bread, a very thick slice, and consumed it in silence. Two children at the other end of the table talked in thin undertones, and Miss Ferrin scraped a dish. The cornstarch pudding didn't seem quite sweet enough, somehow, and there were little lumps in it. Miss Ferrin left her own half eaten and sat looking at Lee, whose spoon moved more and more slowly. She shook her head. Then, with a stealthy glance at Mrs. Darrah's table, she reached swiftly for the sugar bowl and quietly sifted a little sugar over Lee's pudding.

"Just at first," she murmured apologetically to herself.

"Goody, goody!" said Mary Ellen, who ran across Lee at the stair-head. "You're in our dorm'tory, and you're going to sleep in the next bed to me. Miss Ferrin said so.

She sleeps in her room at the end of our dorm'tory. Hurry up—oh, goody!"

The dormitory held sixteen beds, fourteen of which were occupied by the youngest girls at Willburg. Lee was to have the fifteenth. Mary Ellen piloted her to it with glee.

"Mrs. Darrah told me to show you your locker, too," she declared; "c'm' on!"

The lockers were in two sections, one at either end of the room. Mary Ellen counted four from the corner and pulled open a door and a drawer.

"Here's where your things go," she explained.

"What things?"

"Your clothes and everything. Haven't you got no more clothes?" Mary Ellen asked with some concern.

Lee stood thinking of her old play coat, and her best blue tweed coat, and her three blue smocks, and the new one with the orange stitching, and the one with the funny buttons, and her mousey-hat, and her other sweater, and her fuzzy wrapper, and her green dress, and her big boots, and then, all her underwear, and the three fat Braille books of first readings, and all the other dear possessions that Mamsy had packed in the little trunk at the white house.

"I don't believe my things will all go in," she said, measuring the locker with doubtful hands.

"My—you must have lots!" Mary Ellen exclaimed. "You got toys, too? I got a little doll, Christmas, but the girls broke it."

They went back to the beds. "I'm awful glad you're going to sleep next to me," Mary Ellen chattered on. "*I* used to be on the end, and it was awful lonely. *Ooh,* when she turned out the light and it was all dark! Don't you *hate* the dark?"

Lee was undoing the back of her dress slowly. She was not particularly quick with her hands.

"No, why?" she said.

"Can you see any?" Mary Ellen asked.

"No," said Lee.

"O-oh, that's too bad! I can see light, some, when it's close enough,—*real* close. I can tell when she turns off the lights. Oh, I wouldn't *like* it to be dark all the time; I'd be *scared!*"

Lee frowned a little. Mamsy had made the sound of darkness beautiful with tales of stars, and amethyst shadow, and gem-like watch-fires, and the silver moon that came to be a lamp for the sleeping world. Darkness was nothing but a word to her, yet for the first time in her life she felt uneasy about it. There was something that could happen; a power that other people feared. She did not realize that she walked in darkness always. One moment of Mary Ellen's apprehension had erased all Mamsy's quiet pictures of the loveliness of night; silence, peace, star-lamps watching and guiding. She lay straight in bed.

"Has she done it yet? Is it dark now?"

"No," whispered Mary Ellen. "She's coming now."

Miss Ferrin rustled down between the long double row of beds.

"Your prayer, girls," she said automatically. She stood beside Lee's bed while the others recited a high-pitched "Now I lay me." Lee's lips did not move. Anne's ideas of religion were esthetic and unorthodox. Lee had found God in wind and rain and thunder, in budded flower and calling bird; she had cried, "Thank You, God, for everything!" from the top of a high, blown hill, where there were autumn

scents abroad and a great, tender, omnipotent peace hovering close over a golden world. This was not talking to God, this singsong muttering from every bed. ". . . If I should die before I wake . . ." Lee had no intention whatever of dying. Instead of praying at all, she said over and over, silently:

"Mamsy, I love you, I love you, I *love* you!"

Miss Ferrin, watching the flitting expressions of intensity about the mouth, the baffling vagueness of the quiet smoke-gray eyes, wondered what she was thinking of.

"Good night, little Lee," she said, and kissed her forehead, a swift, small kiss as hard and dry as her hand.

"Good night, girls; don't talk." She had said that for twenty years. Then the rustling of her departure passed.

"Did she kiss you?" asked Mary Ellen in a whisper.

"Yes," said Lee.

"My goodness! I guess she likes you."

"Is it dark now?" Lee asked.

"O-oh, yes! Dark as black!"

"Tell me if it's going to do anything."

"Oh, it won't *do* anything," Mary Ellen assured her. "It's just *dark*, that's all. You're a funny girl."

Soon there were small breathings down the line of beds. Mary Ellen yawned and snuggled down and forgot that the light was out. Lee, alone in wakefulness, whispered yet again:

"My Mamsy, I *love* you!"

At that moment Anne, in the living-room of the white house far away, was fashioning a little tune at the piano. Sometimes the stringing of verse was her only relief from

the incessant tyranny of her thoughts, and she sought that relief now. Over and over she played her little sleep song, and sang it tremulously.

"Out of the darkness I sing to you,
Into the dark you go;
Fairy moons I will bring to you,
Light in your dreams aglow;
Lullaby, lull la lo!

"Oh, my love is a light for you,
My kiss is a magic star;
Belovèd, it burns all night for you,
Wheresoever you are;
Lullaby, lull la lo!

"She should be singing to a lover," mused Mrs. Ramsey above. "Strange, perverted passion. My poor Anne!"

Perhaps something of the intensity of Anne's reiterated song winged its way across great spaces, for Lee fell asleep smiling after all, and cried out clearly in her first sleep:

"Mamsy, you did kiss me!"

And Miss Ferrin put down her book and stood for a little while in the doorway listening.

II

The strident pealing of an echoing bell snatched Lee wide awake from dreams of the white house. Sleepy voices were growing louder about her; with whirling memory she struggled into recollection of where she was. Mary Ellen ran around into Lee's aisle to pick up a lost stocking and came upon her sitting on the edge of her bed.

"My, you better hurry up," she counseled. "We have

to be all done by second bell. Why, I'm up to my stock-in's already."

"When do we have our bath?" Lee inquired.

"Friday nights," said Mary Ellen in muffled tones, being at the moment enveloped in a flannel petticoat.

"I have mine every morning," Lee informed her. "It's like warm rain coming down all of a sudden. Then there's a shiny duck that swims, and he *can't* sink."

"I never heard of that kind of a bath," said Mary Ellen. "I guess that's a story."

"No, it's real! Mamsy makes the towel be cosy on the radiator, and I have a pussy wrapper that's blue. Where is my wrapper?"

"I never heard of that kind of a bath!"

"I don't know," Mary Ellen said. "My, haven't you started *yet?* You'll miss chapel, and you'll miss brekfus, too, 'less you look out!"

Lee slid off the bed reluctantly, still wondering if she must dress without the bath that was like warm rain. She groped for her clothes and began to put them on rather awkwardly. Anne had perhaps been too often tempted to shorten the dressing time by doing up stubborn buttons and straightening things that were upside down. Lee buttoned her waist crooked, put one stocking on wrong side out, and was sitting on the floor trying three ways of tying her shoes when another bell pealed and there was a shuffling rush toward the door. Mrs. Darrah's voice spoke close above her.

"Well, here's a slow girl! Come now, quick; everybody else can't wait for slow people, you know. Lorena, you stay and help her this time because she didn't understand about the bell, but tomorrrow you must be ready, Lee."

Lorena's wits had not quite kept pace with her years, but she was sharp enough to run no risk of missing her own breakfast because of a stupid newcomer. She waited just long enough for Mrs. Darrah and the occupants of One-A Dormitory to be well away, and then she, too, fumbled out into the hall.

The dormitory was very still. Lee tied her shoestrings in complicated knots and stood up. Her dress had slipped off the chair and fallen behind it; it took her some time to discover it. Then she sat with it half on, wondering about a great many things. She was in the rapt state of mental detachment when imagined things grow actual. Mamsy's hand might at any moment touch her and do up the difficult middle button at the back of her dress. Then they would go down the crooked staircase of the white house, with the step at the bottom that always squeaked (Mamsy was sure a bewitched mouse lived there), and into the warm, quiet dining-room. First, to see if the flower-pots needed water, and if the baby

fern had uncurled over night. Then toast and marmalade and a boiled egg, and milk in the silver cup that had been Mamsy's once, and that said "Anne" on it in deep scratches

She edged cautiously along the corridor.

that Mamsy could read, and had silver flowers carved on its handle. Mother, when she was able to be there, made coffee come out of a big, hot, silver pot, and that smelled nice, and so did the flowers on the window sill. Perhaps there would be a bird cheeping without. Mother's newspaper would rustle. Mamsy would very likely put a small surprise peppermint into Lee's unsuspecting palm and shut her fingers over it, and they'd laugh hard.

Lee woke her mind suddenly and found her dress still unbuttoned and herself growing hungry. She went through some contortions and fastened it; then, because she did not know the whereabouts of her brush and comb, pushed her hair back with her hands, which rumpled it rather more than

before. She then set off in the direction the other girls had taken, and found the door after some failures. One-A Dormitory was at the end of the corridor and at the head of the stairs, which she had no trouble in finding. The dining-room, however, was another matter. She edged cautiously along the linoleum-covered floors of the endless lower corridor, listening often for a sound of voices or a rattle of dishes which might guide her. But there was nothing except the slow creaking of an unlatched door somewhere. She opened empty classrooms and sniffed doubtfully the atmosphere of old wood and old books.

Then she lost her temper and stamped her foot till her muscles smarted. She beat her fists fiercely upon the painted plaster wall and shouted for Mary Ellen, for Miss Ferrin, and—with rage—for the faithless Lorena. Then she stood with her face against the cool wall and sobbed for Mamsy. As if in answer to her hopelessness, there was suddenly a sound in the stillness. Something soft and flooding and summoning. Lee stopped crying to listen, and then followed down the bewildering passages until her hands came against a door. She found the knob and opened it. The sound was louder; it filled everything. Lee floated on it; it was like a sea of tears. This was a very big room; it rose far over Lee's head and stretched far away from her; the music rolled and lifted in its emptiness. She stole nearer, keeping a hand on the wall. Then she tripped over the end of a raised platform and the sound echoed sharply. The music stopped with a sigh and a rumbling, and an almost grown-up voice asked:

"Who's that?"

"Me," said Lee. "Are you doing it? Go on."

"Well, who are you? Why aren't you in class?"

"What's class?" asked Lee, "and where is it?"

"Gracious!" said the person, and climbed down from the organ bench. "What in the world are *you,* and where are you?"

Long arms lifted Lee up to the platform. This was a big girl. She jumped Lee up onto the high bench beside her.

"I'm practicing the organ," she explained. "Are you a new girl?"

"Yes," said Lee. "I got lost. I wanted to find the dining-room. Go on and make some more organ, please."

"Do you mean you haven't had your breakfast yet? My land! It's been all eat up an age ago! You belong in One-A, don't you? Here, I'll take you there, you poor little young one."

But Lee reached out to touch the mysterious silent ranks of the organ's keyboard.

"Make it play," she begged.

The big girl laughed. A soft breathing seemed to stir the organ; then the girl drew from it some resonant, chanting chords. Lee struck a note; it sent out a prolonged silver cry.

"Oh, mercy, don't! Mr. Lamson'd kill me!" the girl said hastily. "You'll hear it all you want in chapel if you're not so late next time. Here, come on quick."

The big girl poked Lee inside the door of One-A classroom and fled back to the assembly hall. Miss Ferrin, who supposed that Lee had been fed by this time, greeted her coolly.

"Good morning. You're rather late."

"I got lost," said Lee. "May I go out in the garden?"

"Hurry and take your place here between Lulu and Mary Ellen," said Miss Ferrin."

"We haven't no garden," Mary Ellen told Lee in a hasty undertone. "The boys have, though. The veg'tables comes out of it."

"I mean the *garden,*" Lee said.

"Ssh!" warned Mary Ellen, at a signal from Miss Ferrin. "Hold your hand out; no, like that. The flag's in the middle; we point at it."

All at once everybody said something very fast. Lee tried to make out what it was, but it sounded like:

"We-plesh-legion-tower-flag-en-to-thpublic-fwishit-stans-one-nationinvisible-with-libreen-jussis-frall!"

After this mysterious incantation each child said, "Good morning" very politely, which Lee thought silly, considering that they had all been talking to each other long ago in the dormitory. Lulu slapped her suddenly on the arm and said:

"What you?"

"She means, 'Who are you?'" translated Mary Ellen. "She don't know very much. She's Lulu Jones."

"*Miss* Jones," Lulu corrected airily. "Come on says the frog an' see Miss Jones. What you?"

Lee put her hands behind her and faced Miss Jones, who was capering out of her place in the circle with care-free jumps.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Lee declared.

"Oh, I don't neither," Mary Ellen assured her. "Don't mind her. She don't know an'thing."

"Here, Lulu," said Miss Ferrin firmly, "go over and find your beads. No, no, walk nicely, like a good little girl."

Miss Jones, who was small for her eight years, shook her mop of wispy hay-colored hair, turned round and round several times wagging her hands, and set out in search of her

beads, singing loudly a song about Bibby Bumpo. Lee stood frowning. She didn't understand about Miss Jones at all. Miss Ferrin wished, more acutely than she had for some time, that the Commission could find a way of educating separately the mentally unsound.

"Let us have a game before we commence work—a short one," she proposed suddenly.

"Heel-toe," suggested some one.

"'My name is Queen Mary. . . .'"

"Farmer in the Dell," cried several voices.

"Queen Mary!" said Lee.

"We don't know that, I'm afraid," Miss Ferrin said.

"I could show you! Mamsy and me and Ned and Angela and Sally played it and played it in the garden. I ought to have a long silken gown, but it doesn't really matter."

She was on tiptoe in the middle of the ring kindling with imagination. Miss Ferrin could not but watch, speechless.

"The other people stand in a line, and at the end of the

first part I pick out somebody, and at the end of the last part we bow very low and the new person is Queen Mary next time. I'll sing it so you can see how!"

With that she picked the end of an imaginary silken gown off the floor and tripped lightly up and down while she sang in a voice that leaped from a shadowy alto to a fluted soprano:

"My name is Queen Mary,
My age is sixteen,
My father's a farmer on yonder green,
With plenty of money to dress me in silk,
But nobody loves me but—Mamsy."

(She always chose Mamsy.) Never had Miss Ferrin seen in a blind child such freedom of movement, such grace, such whimsical play-acting. A satisfied simper now appeared on Lee's eager face; she was a vain young Somerset maid prinking in her gay attire.

"I rose up one morning
And looked in the glass,
And I said to myself,
'What a handsome young lass!'
My hands on my hips, and I bow to my *toes*—"

(The bow was executed with an absurd flourish; Lee straightened from it flushed and beautiful, eyes shining, hair a tumble of ruddy light.)

"But nobody loves me but—Mary Ellen!" she substituted gallantly, seeking with outstretched hands her chosen partner.

She had flung herself into the impersonation, not only with the spirit of a game, but with a dramatic feeling that could

not escape Miss Ferrin. The teacher glanced around at the patient, unmoved faces of her pupils; at Lee, glowing, quivering, her eager anticipation fading to a puzzled disappointment.

"That's too hard," said Lorena.

"That's no fun," said another.

"Less play Farmer in the Dell," others persisted. So they played it.

"Now bring your knitting, girls," said Miss Ferrin.

"But I'm *hungry,*" Lee protested.

She was not noticed.

III

Mrs. Darrah was surveying Lee's locker and the contents of her trunk, which had arrived and stood open beside it.

"Merciful lands!" said the housemother aloud. "They'd better have sent this one to a finishing school! Three sweaters! My patience, and black slippers! And how many underwears gracious only knows!"

She ended by leaving in the trunk, to be sent to the storeroom, the wrapper, the slippers, the best blue smock, the tweed coat, and two of the sweaters. Being more frugal than artistic, she saw no good reason why a cobalt blue sweater should not be worn over a salmon pink dress. The Braille books and slate she put aside to be turned over to Miss Ferrin. The music box and the sand machine and the shiny duck and the puzzle game and the collection of shells and the lucky pebble and all the other things she piled together to be taken to "the cabinet," a glass repository downstairs, where the children's more valued possessions dwelt in common, to be taken out and handled at infrequent intervals.

Mrs. Darrah shut the door of the locker and leaned against it to make it latch.

"Merciful gracious!" she ejaculated.

Then she went down to sort the mail. That for One-A was not overwhelming in quantity. It consisted of a lurid picture postcard from Lorena's family, and a rather flattened roll of Braille paper.

"Here's a letter for you, Lee Kelton," Mrs. Darrah said, when Lorena's postcard had been read to her and she had departed, sniffing it. "From your folks, I reckon. Well, I never! You can't read Braille, can you?"

"A little bit," said Lee, reaching out.

"Does Miss Ferrin know that?" Mrs. Darrah inquired. "I guess she'll keep you in One-A just the same. Well, you won't want me to read it for you then. Take it along."

It was the playtime after lunch before the afternoon session began. Lee found a corner apart from the other children and sat down crosslegged on the floor to investigate her letter. Even then she didn't quite realize what the little roll of paper meant. She picked it open and spread the curly page across her lap. Braille words were written there; Lee's fingers slowly moved across the first ones, letter by letter. "D-e-a-r dear d-a-r-l-i-n-g dar-ling." She found the next line with the other hand. "M-a-m-s-y i-s—" The "wr" of the next word bothered her; she thought she must be mistaken. It ended in "ing"; she guessed at "writing" and went on. "Dear darling, Mamsy is writing this."

Suddenly it rushed over her as a fact; a message, not a lesson! Mamsy had written this with quick, firm stabs of the stylus there at the desk in the library of the white house. The low desk where Mamsy's sketchbooks were, and the paperweight that was carved like a Chinese man, and the lit-

tle silver flower that said "snap" and held papers so they couldn't get away, and the queer ivory knife that Lee pretended was a dagger and threatened Mamsy with from behind a curtain which veiled a treasure cave. Mamsy had pushed these things aside and spread out her Braille slate and written the letter. A great new use and meaning of reading and writing leaped before Lee. The link was not cut then. Oh, wonderful! A tremendous desire for all knowledge rushed in, as possibilities of new application opened out. She could write everything to Mamsy; it would be like talking on the paper that could go so far. What matter that she could write even less than she read? Mamsy would understand "I love you," even though some of the letters were wrong side before.

She found her place again in her letter and applied hasty fingers to it. But though she clung over every dot, many of the words seemed to mean nothing. From rough handling in the mail, the letters in many places were flattened and obliterated. They seemed to run together; she could not even be sure she was keeping to the same line. And it was one thing to read familiar sentences with Mamsy at hand to supply troublesome words; quite another to decipher alone this bent and unknown document. Only a word here and there crystallized under Lee's impatient fingers. "Bird—fly —little—love you—school—but—forget—" It was maddening. Perhaps neither of them had realized how often Anne, in lessons at the white house, had lifted Lee's hand from the page and solved the stubborn puzzle of letters which lay beneath it. Too often, perhaps.

Again and again Lee attacked the baffling paper. Anger and impatience grew hot within her, and her hands shook, making reading less possible. Forgetting the message,

Mamsy, everything but a surging rage against the inanimate thing that thwarted her, she crumpled the paper violently, tore it across and across, stamped it underfoot. Then, in the midst of the ruin, not only of her letter, but of an imaginary glass ball, she realized what she had done. No one could read the letter now. It was as if she had struck Mamsy, somehow. And all because she had lost her temper. She fancied the shimmering splintered curves of the ball lying at her feet with the rainbow color fading, Mamsy looking at them very sadly. Too wretched for tears, she sat white and inert, her anger spent.

Tore it across and across.

The other children had run out of doors for their free time. One-A classroom was still. Miss Ferrin, coming in to straighten the chairs, found Lee in her corner groping after the scattered fragments of a torn paper.

"Why, what's all this untidiness?" asked Miss Ferrin. "I'm glad you are picking it up."

Lee's first impulse was to kick out in the direction of the intruder; then, feeling another of the mythical balls toppling, she made an effort and sat stiff and silent. Miss Ferrin saw something was wrong with her new pupil and slipped an arm across her shoulders.

"What's the matter, little girl?"

The note of sympathy was too much for Lee, who wept suddenly and bitterly. The teacher stooped and gathered up some of the scraps of paper.

"Why, what is this? This is Braille! Where did you get it? You haven't destroyed one of the big girls' books, surely? 'Love you and love you . . .' 'don't forget . . .' " she read from the fragments, at which Lee sobbed anew. But Miss Ferrin held her firmly in strong, thin arms.

"You must try to tell me, my dear," she insisted.

It was a very confused explanation. Mamsy, and the reading-book that was so much easier, and letters that all ran together just to make a person angry, and something very vague about glass balls that Miss Ferrin didn't understand at all. But she did understand the main trouble.

"And you tore up your letter? Ah, that was a pity!"

"Could you make it be together again and read it?" Lee asked humbly.

"I am afraid not, now. You could so easily have brought it to me, Lee, when you found you could not read it. Can you read Braille that is not so flat?"

"I can," Lee sniffed. "All about the pig and the house. And some other ones, too. Mamsy packed up that book in my trunk. Is it here?"

"Mrs. Darrah put it with the other books."

"Did she take away my slate?" Lee demanded. "I want it. *Now,* please! I want to write to Mamsy, *now.* Please!" she added passionately, as Miss Ferrin did not move.

"None of the One-A girls can read or write yet," she explained. "Miss Blum might not wish you to write. She will be your next teacher. I should have to ask her. But I will write your letter for you with pen and ink if you wish. You could tell me what to say."

"Why mayn't I write?" Lee demanded.

"You will have to wait until you are in Miss Blum's class."

"Let me be there now, then." Lee made as if to set out for Miss Blum at once, and the other teacher caught her arm.

"No, no," she said. "You must stay in One-A until you can do all the things the other girls do, you know."

Lee remembered her fruitless battle with the knitting needles that morning and frowned.

"I know multipicashum tables," she said.

Miss Ferrin shook her head. The curriculum of Willburg could not be rearranged to conform with the one-sided education of this young person. Willburg planned to turn out its graduates efficient blind people; Anne's aim had been to make of Lee a completely normal human being. She had begun teaching her to read without training her fingers in the delicate manual work that would enable her to read more easily. She had filled her mind with half-formed images of seen beauty, and left her unable to tie a bowknot correctly. She had given her freedom of mind and movement, keen love of poetry and rhythm, joy by day and peace by night, single love that was like a clear light; but she had not well enough equipped her with the eyes that lie in the fingertips. Lee had

been learning to live before she had learned to be blind. Anne thought her way was best; Willburg, out of long and pessimistic experience, thought its way best. Who shall say which was right?

Miss Ferrin, sitting beside Lee, saw it all; for in Lee she could more or less perceive Anne. And what most of all filled her was a sense of unfairness, for she did not know the necessity and the heartbreak that had sent Lee to Willburg.

"If the woman started this," Miss Ferrin mused grimly, "she should have finished it. She should have kept hands off or else stuck to what she'd begun. This is all unfair—unfair to us, unfair to the child, unfair, perhaps, to herself."

IV

Anne wrote every day to Lee, looking up from her Braille apparatus to gaze beyond the window at the fading garden. October had left nothing but small coppery chrysanthemums abloom in sober masses along the borders. The poplars and the ash tree sifted now and then a scattering of pale leaves upon the grass. Everything was still—still with the terrible, wonderful stillness of autumn, still with the lack of Lee's voice and light, hesitant step, still with the numbness of waiting that has nothing for which to wait. But, no, Anne was waiting for something, a letter from Willburg. Into each of her epistles to Lee she flung a more and more passionate appeal for news. And there did come at least a long envelope from the institution addressed in a neat, seminary hand. A smaller paper fluttered out from the folded sheet, and Anne caught it up first, for she saw Lee's name at the bottom of it.

"Dear, Dear, Dear Mamsy [the prim handwriting robbed it of Lee's fire; Anne stopped to try to hear just how the beloved voice would say it. Even in two weeks outlines are blurred, edges dulled]:

"Your letters get flat and they are harder than the old book. I want to write to you every minute, but I mustn't know how yet. The organ in chapel is like wind and crying; I like it. Mary Ellen sleeps next to me, and she is afraid of the dark. I love you all the time and all the time. Are all the flowers gone out of our garden? There isn't any garden here, but I found one aster all by himself in a corner. I haven't some of my things; there are too many. I am trying to learn to knit, fast; then can I come home? [There was a small blob of ink here, rather as though the amanuensis had hesitated to transcribe this, and had allowed her pen to drip. A further blot was now added to it in the shape of a sudden tear which splashed upon the paper before Anne was well aware of it.] Will you come awfully soon? Then we could go. Miss Ferrin is writing with a pen for me. Miss Blum teaches the big girls. When I go home will there be snow in the garden yet? Mamsy, I love you, Mamsy!

"Your

"Lee."

The other communication was longer. Anne, after a little, turned her attention to it.

"My Dear Miss Ramsey:

"You have doubtless been eager for news of your little Lee, but we always think it best to wait a short time in order to see how a child is settling in before writing a report to parent or guardian. I think I can tell you that she is not too unhappy, though naturally homesick, as her note enclosed will show you. She is a nervous and temperamental little girl, and, of course, such a change is bound to be difficult for her. You have certainly been able to give her many advantages which most of our little people are unable to enjoy, but I fear that in some ways this makes her present environment seem more strange and distressing. I hope

you will not think I am taking too great a liberty when I advise you not to write her so often. The Braille letters arrive frequently in very poor condition, which, together with her small knowledge, makes it impossible for her to read them, so that they might as well be written in pen and ink. I must tell you that I have not given her a number of them, as I felt that their contents would only serve to sharpen her homesickness and not allay it. You may be sure that if she could, at present, she would write you several letters a day, but you can understand that we must limit the children's letter-writing to stated times and intervals or we should have no rest. Two weeks is the shortest interval we ever allow, except in cases of emergency. She is very much behind in her manual work, but I think will come along nicely after a while. She is certainly most original and shows the contact with things our children seldom know of. She seems well and, apart from a few outbursts of temper, has behaved nicely. Trusting that you will not take my suggestions amiss, I am

"Sincerely yours,

"Amy R. Ferrin."

Nothing, as yet, had happened to sever Lee from Anne other than the actual parting. Suddenly, swiftly, with this letter, a smothering curtain seemed to roll down between them; Anne struggled mentally, wildly, to push it aside. She realized Lee as she had not before, in alien hands indeed, her movements, her impulses, her very thoughts, governed by iron rules. Herded with these "little people" of Miss Ferrin's, allowed to write only when they wrote, forbidden to read her own letters! Yet this woman had read them, the little tender personalities, the intimate, foolish words—and had suppressed them! Anne saw neither Miss Ferrin's compassionate wisdom nor her own emotional folly; blank rage shook her and rushed in to fill the bitter emptiness of her heart. She did not read then the quiet truth beneath Miss Ferrin's stilted sentences; later she

was to read again and understand better. She thrust the letter at her mother.

"What right have they?" she mourned. "They don't understand her; nobody ever has understood her but me."

She struggled for words. Her brain tried to make a picture of Lee, but she did not know how to visualize the place or the woman to whom Lee had dictated the little unrelated sentences of that other, that dear letter, which she still held tightly in her hand. What dress had she on? Did she like this Amy R. Ferrin woman? Was she alone when she found the aster? Did this terrible Mary Ellen frighten her about the dark? Oh, all the minutes, hours, days, rushing on, that Anne could never know about. She was, without realizing it, savagely jealous.

"But you know," said Mrs. Ramsey from her couch, "the lady is quite right. It *does* make it harder for Lee, having this first, I mean. You may remember what I said years ago when I begged you to go slowly: that it might be very cruel kindness."

The thought that she could possibly have been unkind to Lee was too much for Anne. It hurt more than the wave of jealousy. She went slowly back to her desk and sat there staring out into the garden and seeing nothing, though she was dimly aware of a wan pattern of leaves that drifted down. After a long time she leaned forward, and, with a curious thin smile, drew a circle about a date on her calendar two weeks ahead.

V

But neither Anne nor Miss Ferrin knew of all the letters that wrote themselves in Lee's mind. Most of all when

One-A Dormitory quieted to blessed stillness; when Mary Ellen's last "O-oh, but it's dark!" had been hushed, Lee fashioned the tale of the day's doings into a long recital for Mamsy. One day was a great deal like another, but there was always the wonder of the organ's voice, and a shouting wind that raced beside you when you walked in the court, and high birds sometimes singing from the eaves. There were other things, too; dreadfully hard knitting that went into tangles, and the girls who teased, and the soup that had too much salt, and the pudding that had no sugar.

There was a night when Miss Lulu Jones—that unfettered spirit—awoke with a bang, and, apparently believing it to be morning, began shouting her song about the mysterious Bibby Bumpo. Miss Ferrin, in a flannel wrapper, glided in and stilled her severely. She could not forbear looking at Lee's bed as she passed out, and saw that Lee was awake and troubled. She went to her with a whispered admonition to go to sleep.

"But why does she do that?" Lee wanted to know. "Those silly things."

"Lulu can't think with her mind," Miss Ferrin said. "We must be very kind to her."

"Are there more people like that," Lee asked gravely, "that can't think with their mind?"

"There are some," Miss Ferrin confessed.

"I'm sorry," said Lee.

"I am sorry, too, little girl," said the teacher, and tiptoed out.

That was very strange. Some people couldn't see with their eyes, and some couldn't think with their minds—and some were like Mamsy and could do everything. Lee wondered why they were made different to begin with; but per-

haps they were like all kinds of flowers, not meant to be alike at all. That was too bad. Was *that* why Miss Jones was so silly and so strange, because she couldn't think? Lee pondered over the processes of thinking, and began to realize that most people did a good deal of it. Perhaps Miss Jones couldn't understand about things; flowers, and the way the organ sounded, and magic, and the moon, and fairy things, and leaves blowing, and— Lee fell asleep in the middle of a long list of things which she began to fear Miss Jones would not be able to think about, and even in her dreams she was desperately sorry for the light-hearted Lulu.

There was something else that Miss Ferrin did not know of, though hints of it dodged in and out of Lee's infrequent conversations with her. She had no doubt at all but that Mamsy would come soon, very soon, to take her home. In the face of bitter loneliness and thorough hatred of the ways of "school" she was trying to be brave, struggling to be good, because Mamsy had wanted her to come here. But it was with confidence that the effort was for the endurance of temporary misery. Mamsy would come, of course—any day now—and they would go back on that train to the white house and never leave it any more. She was, in fact, treating her sojourn at Willburg as a visit, not a very pleasant visit, but one nevertheless to be met with forbearance and courtesy. But as days and then weeks went on, the suspense and bewilderment grew. Mamsy seemed frighteningly far away; not even letters came to reassure Lee. To her final frantic questioning, Miss Ferrin replied:

"Why, no, my dear, she is not coming back. You must stay at school and learn many things till you are a big girl."

Miss Ferrin might as well have said "forever" so far as

Lee's understanding went. It was a revelation, a realization, too huge and terrible to be grasped. And with a sad lapse of logic, Lee felt wildly that if it was to be forever, if Mamsy was not coming back, what was the use of trying to be good? With a frenzied disregard for the destruction of glass balls, she smashed them right and left. She would not study, she snapped her knitting-needles in two and snatched out the painful work of days; she sent the sympathetic Mary Ellen sprawling, and her weaving-frame after her. She hated everything and everybody. There was let loose, in fact, the full fury of a temper which had not so wholly shown itself since the dark days of her bewildered babyhood.

Shaken and sobbing, she was dragged up from the floor by a scandalized Mrs. Darrah and haled before the august eyes of the superintendent himself. His judgment was swift and superficial. The little infirmary was unoccupied; there this small wildcat must stay, alone, until she was properly penitent and was fit to be with other children. But she couldn't be sorry; that was what the superintendent couldn't see without going psychologically far deeper than he had time for. School would keep on being just the same forever, and Lee would keep on feeling just the same way about it forever. If she said she was sorry and went back to the classroom, there the same things would rise up to be met, there she would realize anew that it meant this forever, and she would want to smash things all over again. It needed something other than solitary confinement to break this deadlock. But Mrs. Darrah led her off without delay to the bare, hot infirmary, dumped her in and shut the door.

She lay on the floor between the two iron beds and sobbed with long, dry sobs. Her head ached with pulsing persistency; her arms, as she stretched them out across the lino-

leum, felt heavy and cold. She was so naughty that she could not stop being naughty, nor did she want to. When Mrs. Darrah brought her a bowl of bread and milk

"Little demon," muttered Mrs. Darrah.

she threw the spoon after her. It clinked down coldly against the closing door.

"Little demon!" muttered Mrs. Darrah, turning the key.

Lee did not touch the bread and milk; she lay still for hours. She was conscious of the weight of her body against the smooth floor. Nothing else existed. Sunlight streamed in and fell across her unknowing eyes. Mamsy would have told her about the marching clouds that were piling high in the blue pattern of sky between the window frames like magic rosy islands. But Mamsy was not there to make beauty out of blankness. There was nothing at all but the pressing hardness of that space of floor in the dark, and for company nobody but her wicked self. For she decided dully that she was wicked. She did not care.

The sunlight faded; the clouds grew into bubbles of molten gold and paled to ash gray. Mrs. Darrah opened the door, looked at the untouched bread and milk, grunted, and withdrew. Lee began thinking of bread and milk at the white house, in front of the open fire, while Mamsy read aloud; then she couldn't stop thinking of it, though she wanted to stop. So of course she cried again; and renewed weeping is like the breaking open of an old wound.

The infirmary was almost dark when Miss Ferrin opened its door. She could barely see the small figure which still lay where it had first thrown itself. And although she had been with blind children for twenty years, her first impulsive thought was: "They might at least let her have some light." Smiling ruefully at herself, she said aloud:

"I have come to put you to bed. You must sleep here, you know."

Lee felt that she must do something to keep up her unenviable reputation. She kicked feebly in Miss Ferrin's direction. The teacher stooped and lifted her up. No one could have guessed that Lee had any claims whatever to beauty. Six hours of more or less steady weeping had left her none.

"You have made me very sorry," said Miss Ferrin.

Lee intimated by a few choked monosyllables that Miss Ferrin's sorrow meant nothing to her. The teacher hesitated.

"You have made Mamsy sorriest of all," she said after a moment.

Lee had known it, of course, for hours. She thought she didn't care. Mamsy didn't—she wasn't coming back. But she hadn't been able quite to deceive herself. Miss Ferrin's words were too much.

"My dear, my dear! You mustn't cry any more, you'll be ill!"

After another moment Miss Ferrin gathered Lee into her arms decisively and left the infirmary.

"There are times for the breaking of every rule," she murmured.

Miss Ferrin's room was still and not bare. It smelled of pine-needles, somehow, instead of disinfectant and steam heat like the rest of Willburg. She put Lee into a big, soft chair that was like one of Mamsy's, and she knelt down and untied Lee's shoes. Cool water felt like a wonderful wind on Lee's stiff face and her hot, aching eyes. Miss Ferrin's bed was wide and soft and smooth; Lee sank into it gratefully. She was still breathing with a telltale catch and quiver. Miss Ferrin sat down upon the edge of the bed. She did not prompt nor urge. She knew that now, the passion and the tears being spent, must come the time for words.

"I wanted—to be—bad," Lee murmured.

"We saw that," Miss Ferrin observed.

"I'm not sorry! I wanted to be good for M-Mamsy. She isn't coming back—ever, so I don't w-want to be."

"You never thought of wanting to be good for yourself?"

Silence.

"Don't you know, little Lee, that many, many people keep right on being good when they think no one cares at all?"

"I couldn't."

"You could. Besides, it's silly to say Mamsy doesn't care." (Miss Ferrin had intended to keep Mamsy out of the conversation, but she found it difficult.) "Of course she cares. Even if you never saw her again—which you will—couldn't you be brave enough to keep on trying? Does she have to be near you? That's too easy. Little Lee, you

won't be really and truly good till you try to be good when nobody at all is watching or wanting you to."

Lee said nothing. It was a hard task. Her hand moved uncertainly on the blanket. Miss Ferrin felt that a touch was little to give. She took it in her own.

"Do you know about stars, Lee?" she asked, after a pause.

Lee certainly knew more about stars than she did about knitting. Something of the old shining dawned in her face as she remembered them. Miss Ferrin was not possessed of a very great imagination, and she had never dealt with a blind child in just the way she was dealing with Lee. She was slowly feeling for an idea—obvious enough, but new to her.

"Do you know about ships steering by a star?"

Yes, Lee knew about ships, too.

"They look at one and look at it, a silver shining star, up above the mast," she almost chanted. "It tells them how to go right."

"Pretend that you are a little ship, Lee," said Miss Ferrin presently, "and that Mamsy is the star you steer by. There may be all kinds of great waves and rocks and winds here where you are, but you could keep looking at the star, and, as you say, it may tell you how to go right."

Lee's hand tightened in Miss Ferrin's. All the imaginative, romantic emotion in her was caught by the idea. The flooding silver light of the star that meant love (light was such a great, vague, wonderful, unknown thing)! Light and love and Mamsy, all tangled together. Something to hold fast—something to steer by. Even if the star never came near, it was there high up, showing the way. Lee was almost asleep. Miss Ferrin lifted her gently from the big bed and carried her into One-A Dormitory. Such a very small ship,

tossing on such a vast, dark, uncharted sea! Miss Ferrin drew the covers up about her. The brief time there in the little room that smelled of pine-needles was gone. She was no longer an individual, but one of many. The iron closed in.

Such a very small ship . . .

VI

The star did serve its purpose, and, if Lee was not saintly, at least she did not repeat her exaggeratedly violent behavior. And Mamsy's letters, though they were infrequent, were reassuring. She did care.

Surprisingly soon there was the Christmas star to think about. One-A made red paper chains and hung them from the classroom chandeliers, where, Miss Ferrin assured them, they looked very gay. They sang vociferous songs about "Santa dear, please come near!" Then there was a day

when Willburg was invaded by grown-ups—everybody's "folks": uncouth men of the mountains tiptoeing consciously in newly-greased boots, faded women from the factory towns. All the lockers were disordered; Mrs. Darrah ran about with a time-table in one hand and somebody's extra stockings in the other. Most of Willburg was going home for the holidays.

"Will Mamsy come now?" How could Lee help asking that!

Miss Ferrin explained that it was too far. All these other children lived comparatively near by. Usually a few homeless members of One-A stayed at Willburg for the vacation. This year Mary Ellen was jubilantly going home with Lorena. Even Lulu's father, a gaunt person from the coal-mines, materialized unexpectedly with a peppermint stick and a new pair of shoes for his daughter and bore her off solemnly. It began to look as if Lee were to be alone in her glory.

"We could board her with the Flynn folks," said Mrs. Darrah, distractedly consulting a list and packing a tooth brush at the same moment. "Or I suppose she can go in with Miss Blum's girls. Bessie and Sarah are staying—and Veronica too, I think."

"I'm perfectly willing to keep her," said Miss Ferrin.

"Thought you were going?" Mrs. Darrah looked up.

"No," said Miss Ferrin quietly, "I'm not."

So Lee slept in the deserted One-A Dormitory and went for walks on the windy hilltop hand in hand with Miss Ferrin, and stayed a great deal in the little cosy room that smelled of pine-needles. It really was pine-needles—a little pillow stuffed with them! Lee curled up in the sunshine of

the window with it tucked beside her cheek. Miss Ferrin wrote at her desk. They talked quite often. Miss Ferrin taught her how to make a little penwiper from scraps of flannel and she sent it to Mamsy with a somewhat wandering poinsettia she had chopped from red paper.

Lee realized quite well that Miss Ferrin and her room couldn't be at the disposal of all One-A—it would be like the old woman who lived in a shoe. But she hoarded these ten days. Miss Ferrin had rightly guessed that she would not be lonely. She expanded in the stillness and intimacy; all the individualism and personality that One-A buried leaped again to the surface.

On Christmas Eve Lee and Miss Blum's three left-overs and several big girls all played games in the Primary room and had apples and nuts to eat. The wind slashed around Willburg; doors banged. From the other wing came the shouts of a handful of stay-behind boys popping corn. The big empty stone building seemed much too large for its diminished family; Miss Blum's girls apparently thought it necessary to make a great deal of noise to make up for fewer numbers. After the party Lee and Miss Ferrin went up to the little room, and Lee found her way to the window and put her hands against the chilly glass.

"The Christmas star is out there," she said, "and my star, too."

Miss Ferrin did not tell her that heavy clouds made a black, smothering curtain without.

"We must fix the candle," Lee said suddenly.

"The candle?"

"In the window," Lee explained. "Mamsy and I do on Christmas Eve. So the Christ-child could find his way. We must!" she added urgently.

A friend had sent Miss Ferrin a superior bayberry candle in a gift box adorned with a rime. It was the sort of thing one puts away because it is too beautiful to use—but it was the only candle at Willburg to the best of Miss Ferrin's belief. It would be very easy to say there were no candles to be had; what was the use of this unseen flame in the dark at best? Miss Ferrin hesitated.

"He could see it," Lee went on, "or perhaps any person, in the cold. They'd be glad. Mamsy couldn't see it so far, could she?" Lee's notions of the limit of sight were sometimes vague.

"Here's the candle, Lee," said Miss Ferrin. "A bayberry one, especially fine."

"Oh, that'll make it all the nicer!" Lee cried, sniffing it appreciatively.

They fixed the candle in place on the window sill, and Miss Ferrin held Lee's hand with the match till the wick blossomed into its pale flower of flame and the wax sent out its warm, spicy fragrance. Lee approached cautious fingers to be sure it was lighted, then stood back and began suddenly to sing—a sober little waif beside her flickering beacon.

"Then be ye glad, good people,
At this time of the year,
And light ye up your candles,
For His star it shineth clear!"

"How about my stocking?" Lee broke off and inquired suddenly. Miss Ferrin was unprepared for this. Fortunately, there was no available fireplace, and how Santa Claus was to come in any other way than down a chimney was a problem even Lee could not solve. Miss Ferrin beguiled

her bedtime with hints of Mamsy's too-bountiful box to be opened on the morrow, and left her at last in the long, still dormitory, to cuddle excitedly to sleep.

In her room, with the bayberry candle sputtering gallantly against the black pane, Miss Ferrin wrote to her friend.

"Your candle was a charming gift. It was so fragrant and pretty that I intended keeping it for some very special occasion, and treasuring it a long time. But the occasion seemed to rise very swiftly, and it is alight now in the best cause, I think, for which it could have burned."

VII

Everything was nearly as much upset and as exciting when the holiday-makers returned as when they left. Mothers who pressed handkerchiefs to trembling lips; the thrilling reunion of comrades with toys to show, and new clothes to exhibit, and tales to tell of home and baby sisters and big brothers; Lulu bawling in maudlin despair over the departure of her lank papa.

Things were different, too. Mary Ellen and Hattie and Josephine went up to Miss Blum's class. Mary Ellen's championing of Lee had never waned, and Lee did not realize until it was gone how much comfort it had brought. None of the other girls had grown very friendly; there was a mutual sense of having little in common that unconsciously kept them apart. But if Mary Ellen had gone, Jill Peters had come—and that was the beginning of something that Miss Ferrin watched with ever-increasing interest.

Jill was, in Miss Ferrin's private opinion, the most unattractive scrap of humanity that had ever darkened the door

of Willburg. She was only six, and small at that. Her mouse-colored hair hung away from her white little face in dejected wisps; her eyes were sadly scarred, with a perpetually frightened look in their blankness. She had never in her life been away from the four-family tenement in the shadow of a factory, nor the big, untidy mother who alternately punished and spoiled her. The strangeness of Willburg was, curiously enough, even harder for her to face than it had been for Lee, for she had no reserves but incomprehension and fear with which to meet it.

Mary Ellen's guiding hand and intervening friendliness withdrawn, Lee was thrown upon her own resources so far as the practical routine of school life went, and she found

The solace consisted of a cookie.

them surprisingly large. But that she was capable of being the protector instead of the protected, was for Jill to make known. Lee came upon this small lost spirit weeping bitterly

beneath a bed in One-A Dormitory and promptly sprawled beside it to make inquiry.

"Who are you, crying under there?"

Upon the wails being doubled at this, Lee hauled out the sufferer, mopped up her tears none too gently, and pursued the wise course of offering solace before trying to probe the cause of the woe. The solace consisted of a cookie which Lee had prudently secreted in her pocket at dinner time. She had planned to creep into the corner of the big coat locker (which no one but herself suspected of being a perilous, sea-girt cave) to feast on her cookie, sweetened with solitude. But this was not to be. The cookie somewhat revived Jill, who had had no heart for dinner, and she relaxed and submitted to Lee's swift and gentle survey of her person. The dull, straight hair was soft, and therefore pretty—to Lee—and she was unaware of the ill-assorted and unlovely features which made up Jill's woebegone countenance. Her hands lingered on the scant and draggled cotton garment not yet replaced by one of the stout galatea aprons from the school supply.

"Are you *so* lonely?" Lee inquired.

A small nod, imperceptible to Lee, who thought no answer at all forthcoming.

"Well, you aren't supposed to be in the dormitory now," she counseled. "Come on, I'll show you a nice place. It's a cave, a rocky cave, and perhaps treasure's in it; how do you know?"

Jill certainly didn't know; she had no idea what a cave was. But she did like the companionship of this hand which clasped hers and led her firmly along. She was not sure she liked the narrow quarters of the coat locker, which was very

still and totally dark. (By a mockery, Jill's disfigured eyes could discern daylight, while the clear and perfect depths of Lee's met unchanging blankness.)

"We aren't supposed to be here, either," Lee remarked in a bated whisper. "We ought to be in the playroom. But never mind. It's too bad we ate up the cookie. We can't escape because the sea dashes up against the outside. But there might be another way out. I'm going to explore."

Jill hugged her knees and allowed her jaw to drop. She understood the remark about the cookie and agreed with it; after that, she was lost.

"Booh!" quoth Lee impressively, "my candle's gone out; I can't see a bit. P'raps the treasure's farther in."

But Jill whimpered at being left, and Lee crept back and squeezed down beside her, no longer the explorer, but counselor and comforter.

"It isn't a real cave, you know." (*That* hadn't troubled Jill!) "But it's a nice secret sort of a place. Oh, don't mew; I won't let anything happen to you." (Anne would have wryly smiled to hear so many echoes.) "Where did you come from?" Lee continued. "Have you got a Mamsy far away?"

"My ma leaves me play wid clozepins," Jill volunteered, warming to a confidence.

"Clothes-pins!" said Lee. "What else do you play with?"

"A stone one time; I found it."

"I found a stone," Lee told her, "a lucky stone. It *was* lucky, there was a stripe all inside it. That same day a squirrel came, and the wind gave me two songs."

"You couldn't to play wid no wind," Jill objected.

"Oh, but you *can!* Didn't you ever run with the wind

after you, and have him push you hard, and make all the leaves go clap-clap? And he sings songs—and *that's* playing."

"Mebbe I'd like that playin'," Jill said doubtfully.

She ended by falling asleep with her head in Lee's lap. When they emerged stealthily some time later, Jill had the feeling of having been through a bewildering and perilous adventure, and she attached herself definitely and unswervingly to the heroine of that adventure.

Lee contrived to get herself into several brawls over her protégée, to which Miss Ferrin shut her eyes. To the teacher's question:

"Why do you like Jill so much, Lee?" her champion replied, rather ungraciously:

"Nobody else does. *Somebody* has to like her."

It amused and amazed Miss Ferrin to see Lee, who was still known to stamp her foot at her weaving frame, patiently guiding Jill's clumsy fingers with hands by no means patient over their own tasks. She led Jill about the devious corridors of Willburg at a competent pace, and when they all played out in the bare open courtyard, she allowed this apprehensive small person to cling to her no matter how summoning a wind shouted for her to run with it.

But it soon became apparent that here was no mere nursemaid's charge to be shepherded about and ministered to in the flesh alone. Here, it seemed, was to be a disciple of Anne's teaching of visual beauty—and Anne's tears would have flowed to see her theories so earnestly put into practice; small things that had seemed, at the time, to mean so little. Lee was astounded by Jill's ignorance. At first her talk went freely on; then, as she began to realize that Jill understood little of it, she undertook solemnly to explain things only

dimly guessed at by herself. Color words began to trickle through Jill's speech. Little lilting echoes of Lee crept out in her halting sentences. Miss Ferrin watched and wondered. But where Lee's understanding of seen loveliness was a fabric of sound woven for her by Mamsy out of silver words and sinuous rhythms, Jill's was, so far, but parrot talk.

Lee would stand at the window near their beds with her face to the muffled, starless sky and tell Jill that the moon was there, and that it was like a round whiteness as big as *this,* and cold as snow—white as snow, too, and shining. And Jill would stand rapt, holding with her small thin hands the sleeve of Lee's nightgown, and shining herself, not because she loved the moon in the least, but because she loved Lee with all the small, striving heart of her.

Lee, through all the months that Jill hounded her footsteps and hung upon her words, never suspected that she was the heroine of the only fairy tale that had ever come into Jill's life. With the color that had grown bit by bit in Jill's cheeks had crept, too, a glow into her pale little spirit and a lift into her voice, so that it was now not merely an echo when she said, "Everything is beautiful! I love everything!" Jill, too, had found a star to steer by.

But some of the conviction had left Lee's heart. Everything was *not* beautiful. You might say it all you pleased, but it was not true. Many things people did were not beautiful. Willburg itself was not: hot and musty and filled with the smell of linoleum and varnish through all its bare length and breadth. Even some things supposedly to be trusted were not—like spring, for instance.

Lee, in the courtyard, wild with joy at the smell of April

new in the air, seized upon a passing grown-up—who happened to be Miss Blum—and questioned her eagerly.

"Are there tiny leaves yet?" she demanded. "Baby green

"Mercy, child, there isn't a tree in sight."

ones on all the trees?" Her gesture indicated the sweep of an enclosing forest about Willburg.

"Mercy, child, there isn't a tree in sight," Miss Blum declared. "I don't know."

"No trees?" Lee's voice went down. "What is there?"

Miss Blum paused and viewed the landscape as one who does so for the first time.

"Well, there's the road out in front, going down the hill to the town, and the house roofs down there, and the sawmill over on the right."

Either Miss Blum did not see the distant mountains like sapphire smoke on the horizon, or else she did not consider them an integral part of the scene. Lee, all winter, had for

some reason imagined that tall trees stood in close and creaking ranks without the stone wall of the courtyard. Their destruction thus with a word left her strangely at loss. She tried unsuccessfully to rebuild the unknown outside the wall. No trees; no grass, perhaps. She stooped and sought along the substantial flagging of the court. In New England hepaticas were in bloom. Lee and Mamsy had found them in a thin wood that rose above a tiny waking brook. There had been dry leaves under foot, and bare branches that snapped back, and the fitful music of running water over cold stones. That was last year. Hepaticas couldn't grow out of paved courtyards. . . . Then a song-sparrow tumbled out a generous stave of ecstatic notes and gave Lee the spring after all.

VIII

But there was doubt and the beginnings of disbelief. Little things—Mary Ellen's fear of the dark, Miss Blum's uprooting of the fancied trees, Mrs. Darrah's impatient cry of, "Oh, pretending to look at the moon again! There hasn't been any moon for a week!" The matron's tone implied that there never would be any moon again. Jill could not now urge Lee to the window. Mrs. Darrah had stricken the moon from the sky.

With the proud secrecy of childhood she kept to herself the waning of her faith. Jill had learned her lesson so well that she scarcely realized that it was now she and not Lee who prated of blue sky and golden sun and jeweled dew. For slowly there was growing in Lee a conviction that Mamsy, in her dear kindness, had colored an ugly world in the likeness of a fairy tale.

Rain, for Lee and Mamsy, had been silver arrows, gray tremulous shafts; its message and its music were clean and free. But Mrs. Darrah flew to bang windows. "My lands, what a day! Everything's a regular mud-squolly! Oh, I do hate a rainy day; is anything more miserable and dreary!" Nothing was, the servant thus appealed to agreed. One by one Lee's pictures were marred. After all, these people could see the world they moved in. Lee had nothing with which to combat their denials of beauty but the memory of half-comprehended assurances of loveliness. As long as there was Miss Ferrin and the little pine-needley room, there was a weapon. It was when Lee went into Miss Blum's class and the Primary Dormitory that she was left defenseless.

That was after the short summer holiday. Lee and Jill spent it together at the State Farm in company with some other blind girls and some orphan children, a motley collection of waifs, crowded into the bare, ugly farm building that for all its ungainly size was not quite large enough to hold them comfortably. Jill and Lee strayed off together over stupid stubbly fields and lay in the meager shade of a wild apple tree to talk of everything. Lee did not ask any one what prospect lay beyond the mown meadows. If you did not ask, there could be no disappointing answer. There were small growing things in the meadow, and a wind that rattled in the wild apple tree; better to be content and accept as fairest what lay close at hand. But, oh, if she could have known of the magic mountains that swept a tall blue pattern against the sky!

Anne, following one thought too eagerly, had perhaps overstressed beauty. Beauty and ugliness were only words for Lee when they were applied to intangible things. But

other senses set a standard; her mental pictures often went hand in hand with flying wisps of melody. Perhaps Anne had too much ignored the unlovely. She was an artist, and she could find the picturesque element of pattern or color in almost everything. It was that side she had always given Lee, never the unvarnished form the world saw. She had never thought to make it clear to Lee that the eyes of the spirit as well as of the body must be able to see before the image of beauty could be complete.

Miss Ferrin had told fairy tales and nature lore, and stopped the class to hearken to bird-song, but Miss Blum stuck stoutly to the three R's and seldom looked beyond a textbook. She was there to teach arithmetic and Braille, and she taught them, unadorned. Her girls talked of somebody's new dress, of the awful cross fit Mr. Lamson had, of the way Hattie giggled in chapel, of Blum's squeaky shoes. They walked up and down in threes and fours, arms tightly interlaced, chattering continuously. They were all rather older than Lee. Even Mary Ellen seemed to have suddenly shot on into a new age, a new personality. She was tolerant and spasmodically helpful, but she was infinitely superior to Lee and gave her no chance to forget the fact.

And poor little Jill was left behind. She worked herself ill trying to follow Lee into Primary and lost time instead of gaining it. Lee was not allowed to visit her in the infirmary. Everything to do with One-A seemed remote and passed; even Miss Ferrin, when Lee met her in the corridors, stopped only for a word and a swift pat of encouragement. Primary Dormitory was larger than One-A and lodged the girls from two classes. Some of them were as old as twelve. It was a grown-up place; you had to make your own bed and

darn your own stockings and take turns at sweeping. Lee's sweeping was, as Mrs. Darrah put it, "a disgrace to behold."

But if the only half-comprehended beauty of sight was dulled by doubt, more and more the beauty of sound grew in Lee's spirit and softened the loss. The music in chapel made every early morning a time of keen joy. Lee was never late now. The organ shook the big hall; the young, mounting voices of the upper school choir, singing in perfect harmony, swept up in a pæan of pitiful praise. How Lee longed to be old enough to sing with them; to rank with those fortunates of the advanced music class from whose number one was chosen each morning as organist.

The Primary children practiced Christmas carols, a patient, well-drilled little group, singing in clear unison and flawless tempo. Mr. Lamson strode softly up and down the aisles, clicking his baton on a bench as he passed to accent a difficult beat, humming the parts the organ should take, surprising a lazy singer with a light rap on the shoulder. He never found Lee silent. The pitch of many of the carols was too high for her, so she devised something more or less like a second, and sang it brazenly and blissfully until Mr. Lamson cocked a detecting ear and descended upon her with a reprimand. He nevertheless entered her at the office as being eligible for special musical instruction, and she forthwith began solfeggio and five-finger exercises, perched on a piano stool alone in one of the practice cubicles.

All the practice pianos had seen better days, and, in this, were reminiscent of the one at the white house, but Lee thoroughly enjoyed being shut up with one of these ancient instruments, and played forbidden tunes with one finger or sang many other things besides scales. If Mr. Lamson

chanced by at such a time, he stormed in upon her without delay. Mr. Lamson always smelled of cigars and was rather terrifying to most of his pupils, but Lee had discovered subtly that she could always propitiate him by singing *The Ploughboy in Luck* as low as she possibly could. He invariably roared with bass laughter and warned her that he would shut her up in a cubicle on bread and water if she insisted on singing contralto at her age.

"Awful. Ha!" said Mr. Lamson.

One day, as she made her way through the assembly hall to the practice rooms, she heard the organ being played as no boy or girl at Willburg could play it. Solemn, tremendous chanting, living cries of anguish, a superhuman shout of faith—the organ poured them into the stillness in a wave of vibrant emotion. Lee crept closer, shaken. She had never before heard anything like this. The torrent of wonder stopped with a jerk and Mr. Lamson said:

"Hmph! *You* ought to be practicing, young lady."

"I thought it would be you," Lee said. "I can't practice now. I want that to keep on being in my head just as it is now."

"Oh, do you. That's Beethoven, child. He made better music than anybody else. When he made that, Lee Kelton, he was going deaf, so he couldn't ever hear any more music, his own or anybody's. What do you think of that, eh? Couldn't hear it any more, ever."

"That would be awful," Lee said, trying to imagine it. "Why, there'd be nothing, then!"

"Awful. Ha!" said Mr. Lamson.

He looked at her standing there below the platform in the green crêpe smock that was getting much too small for her. He watched the quiver about her sensitive mouth, the inward eagerness of her face—an understanding face. The music had moved him deeply, also. It was on his tongue to tell her what had been in his mind as he played it; to tell her of the dizzying blurred roar that sometimes assailed his ears of late, the difficulty he occasionally had in being sure that the children sang on pitch. If it kept on—increased—it would mean the losing, not only of his position, but of all the joy of life. Mr. Lamson, smoking his big cigars and storming at his pupils, walked in terror and anguish. And he had nearly told this to a small institution child in an outgrown dress!

"Must be getting into my dotage," he muttered. "You march along and practice, Miss Kelton. Always nipping off a minute here and a minute there. I'll have to report you to the office."

In a way it was a pity he didn't tell her. Mr. Lamson and Beethoven would have run together in her mind, the one

playing the other's music, and both going deaf. And when Mr. Lamson snapped at the Primary choir thereafter and blustered up and down with long, nervous strides, Lee would have sung better than them all to please him. And when the girls called him a "mean old thing" Lee would have punched them into respectful silence. But she would not have told any one of his lonely fear; which, of course, he could not be expected to know.

When Jill did catch up and got into Primary with the fall term, she found a change she could not understand. Lee was heartily glad to welcome her, but not on the old grounds. Jill's high, slender voice was eager as ever.

"How do *I* know? *I* can't see it."

"Tell me, tell me everythin', Lee!"

It was the first evening when September-sweet air struck softly in upon the Primary room.

"Tell me what the night's like this time." Her little tense fingers hovered on Lee's arm.

"How do *I* know?" Lee said, with a queer, careless irritation. "*I* can't see it."

Some other girls came near.

"Tell me," Jill begged, "aren't there no stars?"

"Oh, hush," Lee said, and pulled her hand away.

Jill shrank back, hurt and puzzled. It seemed as if Lee were ashamed of her. She could not know that Lee had grown ashamed of an interest in things which did not interest the others.

"You ain't mad, Lee?"

"Of course not." Lee was stung by the pitiful humility in Jill's voice. "Come on and I'll show you where things are around here."

IX

Anne had grown used to the silence of the white house. Undeniably, silence was more conducive to painting. Even so, the pictures were not easy to market. Anne looked more tired than in the days when she had been obliged to paint with one hand and manage Lee with the other. Perhaps it was because she was a little older. Perhaps it was because Mrs. Ramsey suffered and smiled more.

Angela Morton went by the white house each day to school. She was eleven and she had long legs and large hair-ribbons. Ned Stiles wore Eton collars and woolen knickerbockers and parted his hair on the side. Could it be that, somewhere, Lee also was eleven? Lee lived forever in the white house, for Anne, a flitting memory of short blue frock, bare brown knees, roundness just giving way to

slenderness. Half-past seven—an enchanting, an elusive age.

Anne now received letters written by Lee herself, increasing fortnightly in form of expression as Lee's knowledge of writing Braille increased. But Anne could not help feeling that the letters were distinctly dutiful. When the intimacy of local allusions is made invalid by time it is difficult to keep up a written spontaneity. Anne was aware that her own letters were becoming dutiful. "How I wish I could see you this minute, dearest." "How I wonder what you are doing." That didn't in the least convey what she meant; and she had written it so often. Lee wrote fragmentarily of an alien world. Blum and her mandates . . . The classroom being painted . . . Lee was studying music; she sang in the Lower Choir. Nor did that convey to Anne anything of what it really meant, that music had become a living expression of faith and beauty in a world robbed of much that had been wonderful. Even if Lee had realized it, she couldn't have put it in a letter. Besides, Mamsy had become little more than a dear name, the summing up in one word of something that had been lovely long ago; a star still, but a very distant one, remote and cold and unattainable. Writing "Dear Mamsy," was now an agreeable habit instead of the allaying of a heart-rending desire.

X

At the beginning of the summer when Lee was eleven, Mrs. Darrah and Miss Blum and the superintendent took counsel together and decided that she should spend the vacation with a private family.

"I think as a girl grows older," Miss Blum stated firmly, "the contact with home life is very important."

"Quite so," the superintendent agreed. "It tends to the normal. Mrs. Darrah, you are most familiar with the possibilities; whom have you in mind?"

"I was thinking of Hattie Bates's people," Mrs. Darrah said. "It's quite a high-class home. You know how well they always have dressed Hattie. Lee'd get a real experience of family life there, and I imagine they'd be glad to have company for Hattie—and the board, of course."

Hattie's papa, on being communicated with, stated in a sprawling letter that one more kid under foot was all the same to him, and that he would expect to meet the 2:40 on June 19th. So Hattie and Lee, with half-fare tickets pinned to their coat lapels, were put in charge of a local train conductor who was used to shepherding Willburg pupils about, and they set forth to Buryville.

Hattie was a year older than Lee, a fair, big-boned child whose face somehow gave one the impression of being the same shape and color all over. Its smooth pinkness was broken by a disproportionately small mouth, a neat, nondescript nose, and a pair of rather flatly-set, pale-blue eyes that looked more vacant than sightless. She wore for the journey a red and green plaid dress and a blue serge jacket, and carried her belongings in an imitation sole leather valise. Lee's were disposed in two pasteboard boxes, the little trunk in the storeroom being too large for her present wardrobe.

Lee had never been very friendly with Hattie; she did not know quite how to begin the intimacy forced upon her now. Hattie babbled on with the train:

"You'll just love my home. My, I'd hate to go up to the Farm where you'n Jill been going. We have a phonograph

of our own, and Momma does the loveliest things for us! Oh, my little brother must be awful big now! You'll just love *him;* he says the cutest things! He's three; his name's Bernard."

Hattie's confidences beguiled most of the journey to Buryville, where the conductor propelled the young travelers out upon the platform and into the arms of an ample citizen who stood scanning the arrivals.

"Well, Hattie! Real glad to see you! Bigger'n ever, eh? This your friend? Hello, girlie. Momma stayed home fixing up a cake or something for you, I guess. Bernie yelled to come, but I figured I'd have my hands full. Gimme the baggage, now; Hattie, you grab Poppa's hand, and you catch hold of Hattie—what's your name?"

"Lee Kelton," Lee told him.

Mr. Ed Bates was the proprietor of Buryville's most thriving grocery store. As he and his charges stood waiting for the quarter-hourly street car, he could not help gazing benignly at the plate glass window of Bates' Buryville Bazaar opposite, behind which a galaxy of soup cans and up-to-the-minute show cards made a gallant display. Mr. Bates had never been quite sure that "Bazaar" appropriately described his shop, but he had been unable to resist the temptation of using one mammoth capital B for all the words on his sign and no other term beginning with that letter seemed to fit as well. At that moment the slender form of a young man in shirt sleeves appeared behind the soup cans and waved a respectful hand.

"Joe's waving to you out of the store," Mr. Bates informed his daughter, whereupon Hattie acknowledged the greeting with a stiffly agitated arm.

Lee's first—and continued—impression of the Bates house

was that it smelled slightly of onions. As long as she stayed there, onions were served but twice, yet their phantom aroma made a faint background for all the scenes enacted in

"Oh, isn't he too cute!" Hattie cried.

the house. The rooms were small—Lee felt that instantly, after Willburg's bare height—and they seemed to be loaded with a vast amount of hangings and carpets. Wherever Lee turned she encountered a fat cushion, a tufted couch cover, a velvet table scarf, or a ponderous curtain. (Mrs. Bates called them "throws" and "drapes.") This lady hurried out from the kitchen with Bernard pattering behind her as her husband's substantial tread shook the narrow front porch. She engulfed her daughter in a spacious embrace, and then kissed Lee moistly and maternally. Bernard, somewhat sticky from premature encounters with the cake, clambered noisily on his sister.

"Oh, isn't he too cute!" Hattie cried. "You've bobbed

his hair shorter, haven't you? Well, hasn't he got on the dearest little pants, just like a real big fellow!"

Lee wasn't particularly hungry after the train ride, but the cake, hot from the oven and coated with half an inch of mocha frosting, was very good, and she ate a slice gravely, sitting on the edge of a chair.

"Well, now, I think this is lovely," Mrs. Bates exclaimed, trying to break the ice which appeared to surround her guest. "Lovely for Hattie to have a little chum this summer. I expect you girls'll have great times. Hattie, Mildred was asking me just yesterday when you'd be home. She says, 'I'm just crazy for Hattie to get home,' she says. I expect she'll be running in. Have another bite of cake, Lee—you'd ought to be hungry, riding so far on the cars."

"No, thank you," said Lee. "It was very nice."

Mildred did run in and she and Hattie giggled and chattered about a hundred local happenings unknown to Lee, who presently edged off to find Mrs. Bates. That lady was attending to supper in the kitchen. The cake still oppressed Lee somewhat; the idea of supper appalled her.

"I could unpack my things, Mrs. Bates, if you'll show me where I'm going to sleep."

"Well, gracious, dear, I've unpacked your little things and Hattie's. You don't think I'd ask *you* to do that, do you? You and Hattie're going to sleep together. I expect you'll lay awake most all night talking, but little girlies visiting always do, I guess. I know I used to, and I think it's lovely. I'll show you where it is now if you like. You'd better get fixed up for supper now, anyways. Hattie'd ought to, too. *Hat*-tee! Come in, dear, and let me perk up your bows a little. Mildred, you'd better run along home, dear."

Mrs. Bates brushed not only Hattie's hair but Lee's.

"I can brush it, thank you," Lee informed her.

"Oh, let me, dear, it's so pretty! You'd ought to have a bow on it, though, like Hattie; it'd be cute then. Wait a minute till I get one of hers. I just love to fuss with folks' hair. I never can do a thing with Hattie's, it's so fine. My, I'd like to have yours to fuss with. Stand still, dearie, till I fix it."

Adorned with a flamboyant and rather uncomfortable hair ribbon, Lee descended to the dining room, where Bernard, chipper and wide awake at half-past six, was battering the table with a spoon and demanding yet more cake. Mr. Bates, who had returned from a hasty trip to the store, had thankfully removed his coat, and, his vest unbuttoned, sat reading the Buryville *Bulletin* and turning a cigar in his mouth.

"Poppa, it's lovely to be home!" Hattie confided, perching her plump person on his knee. He laid his cigar on his butter plate and caressed her, kissing the tip of her ear and rubbing his well-shaven chin against the soft sameness of her cheek.

"How about it, kiddy?" he inquired of Lee across the table. "You glad to be home, too?"

"Yes, thank you," said Lee.

"You're kind of down in the mouth. I guess supper's what you need. We'll see pretty quick what Momma's got to perk us up. Here she comes now."

Supper was anything but what Lee needed. She swallowed portions of spaghetti and cheese, and hot biscuit, and tea, and prune whip mechanically, because at Willburg one ate everything that was set before one. The evening afterward was long and nightmarish. If she could have curled up on the padded sofa, perhaps the phonograph would not have

sounded so loud. It played "Oh, You Beautiful Doll" and "The Ragtime Violin" determinedly with a needle which had not been changed for weeks, and Lee sat on one of the straight chairs and endured chaos both internal and external. Bernard, who apparently never went to bed, circled the room in resounding jumps and added shouts to the syncopated blarings poured forth by the phonograph.

Mrs. Bates was quite right: Hattie did want to talk all night, after they were abed. Lee finally escaped by feigning sleep. She lay as far on the edge of the bed as possible, to avoid contact with Hattie's warm, restless body. The bed creaked every time Hattie moved. Outside, the electric car passed often, grinding up-grade, and a persistent church clock chimed the quarters a little off pitch. Lee could not recollect that she had ever slept with anybody before. Yes—oh, so long ago—when she had spent a night in Mamsy's arms after having been assailed by a frightful dream-dog. She remembered still his dreadful barking and her cry of terror, and Mamsy's voice through it all, "He isn't there really, beloved. It's all right now, isn't it?" Queer how a few memories of the white house stood out clear and vivid. . . .

She was going to be here with the Bates family all summer—three months. Did Mrs. Bates always make such big cakes? How could Bernard be so wide awake at nine o'clock? Did they have any other tunes on the phonograph? Did the church clock strike all day and all night? Lee did not hear it chime the half after ten. She slept uneasily, her arm hanging down over the edge of the bed.

Before she left Willburg Lee had been duly impressed by Mrs. Darrah that the Bateses had a lovely home and that

she was a lucky little girl not to be going to the State Farm this summer. But at the Farm there had been those wide, stubbly meadows, and a smell of dry grass, and crickets cheeping; and in the Farm parlor was an aged melodeon which would yield pleasing melody to any hard-working musician devoted and able-bodied enough to pedal it with the necessary vigor. There was such a crowd at the Farm that one could go off and be alone without being particularly missed. But escape from the tightly drawn circle of the Bates household was impossible. They possessed no musical instrument but the insistent phonograph, and, though Buryville was far from being a city, the atmosphere outdoors seemed to be quite as oppressive and inactive as that within. Though quite a large yard extended to a board fence in the rear of the Bates residence, their only idea of its usefulness seemed to be as a storage place for ash-cans, grocery boxes, and other such things too bulky for the cellar to take care of. A small patch of parsley made a diminutive spot of green in one corner, and a few discarded house plants in cracked pots stood withering in a row on a rusty-runnered sled.

These items were discovered one at a time by Lee during a hopeful tour of the yard. Mrs. Bates, however, called to her from the kitchen window.

"Oh, you don't want to play *there,* dear! Hattie was looking for you all over. Come out in front, Lee."

Bernard's playground seemed to be the sidewalk in front of the house. There, on the smooth cement, he tirelessly propelled a miniature velocipede the length of the block. His parents' idea of outdoor activity, in their leisure, seemed to be sitting on the front porch and watching him do it. From porches closely to right and left could be heard the

measured squeak of rocking-chairs, where other parents did likewise. In fact, Mrs. Bates, with little added expenditure of vocal effort, could exchange news and recipes with her neighbors immediately to the north and south without leaving her own porch.

Hattie sat on the front steps perpetually and did nothing. If Mildred ran over they talked and tickled each other and, as Mrs. Bates indulgently put it, "fooled around." Lee sat on the steps likewise and crocheted. She hated crocheting, but doing nothing at all she hated worse. Also, if her hands were busy, Hattie and Mildred weren't so likely to paw over her, which she hated worst of all. The crocheting was to be a large mat for Mrs. Bates' rubber-plant to sit upon. Mrs. Bates was touched and besought her neighbors just to come and look at what the dear, smart little girl was making for her. It was really generous of Mrs. Bates to feel no resentment that Lee should do what Hattie did not. As a matter of fact, Hattie crocheted far better than Lee ever would, but her maxim was never to do a stroke of anything outside school. What was a vacation for, anyway?

Lee had never sent a mat to Mamsy. Pot-holders she had sent her, and calendars, and book-marks, and other useful manifestations of her increased manual skill. But instinctively she knew that Mamsy disliked both crocheted mats and rubber-plants. She must, or there would have been both at the white house. Lee's recollections of the white house held no memory of either.

Lee was a credulous person; she was apt to believe what people told her because she had never imagined that there could be any good reason to doubt. Mrs. Darrah had told her this was a lovely home. If it was, then what was the white house? Fast becoming a fairy tale, embroidered now

with wistful and uncertain memories. This world of Willburg and its environs was so large and solid and present; its people were so much in the majority. Could she trust her dwindling memories of Mamsy and the white house? Time must have colored them more rosily than truth. But into the midst of these not very clear musings on Lee's part came a letter from Mamsy herself, forwarded from Willburg.

"I wonder where you're spending the summer? Oh, how I wish a magic carpet could catch you up and whisk you over blue hill and green vale, over smoking city and gleaming river, and set you down in the garden of the white house! I wonder if you've forgotten the garden. The apple tree is bigger than when you went away and makes a broader patch of shade on the cool grass. The foxgloves are full of bees, and the fingers of the lupin leaves catch a drop of dew for fairies to drink just the way they did when you were here. The oriole still builds his nest in the ash-tree and shouts golden good-mornings to me when I come out on the lawn. The poplars still clap their tiny pattering hands when the wind runs by. I wish I could hear you play, darling! So many things I wish! I wonder if you still make up tunes about flowers and wind and the fire, the way you used to. I wonder if you remember the way you used to sing them to Mamsy at bedtime. . . ."

Lee tried to remember. The trouble was, nowadays, she read Mamsy's letters as if they were parts of a story book. Mamsy didn't exist at all. Lee wondered what a tune about a rubber-plant or a rocking-chair would sound like. Hattie ran an inquiring thumb across the number of pages in Mamsy's letter.

"My goodness," she said, "you mean to say you read all

that? Why, it's as bad as a week's lessons! Lemme see what it says."

Lee resorted to a swift push as the only instant and effective means of keeping her letter private, whereupon Hattie tumbled backward down the steps, skinning her elbow and bursting into horrified howls. Even the growing proportions of the crocheted mat did not propitiate Hattie's mother for some days thereafter. Lee didn't mind, because they let her alone. She went out in the back yard and sat on a pleasantly warm and wooden-smelling box in the sunshine and sang in a guarded minor.

Lee soon learned that the Willburg maxim of polishing one's plate did not hold good here. Mrs. Bates drew lavishly, not to say recklessly, upon the merchandise of the Bates Buryville Bazaar, and her table staggered with needless quantities of food. Bernard's cheeks were always bulging, no matter what the time of day, and Hattie's usual porch-step companion was an immense wedge of her mother's latest kind of cake. The atmosphere of the evenings, especially, was one of almost painful satiety.

These evenings were occasionally enlivened by the appearance of Joe, the brisk young clerk from the store. He was as spare as his employer was plump, and this was, possibly, the reason for his greater energy and activity.

"Let's have the victrola out here on the porch and get together on our dancin' some," was his invariable suggestion.

He was teaching Hattie the Turkey Trot, which was in its heyday.

"Joe—that little kid; do you think that's a nice dance?" Mrs. Bates would blandly remonstrate, inwardly elated to see her daughter shuffling about in the arms of this spruce

young man. Hattie giggled and bobbed up and down with about as much grace as a broomstick, and Joe winked spaciously at the audience and hitched his shoulder and said:

"You're comin', Hattie! Just limber up and foller me and you'll do slick."

He also tried to dance with Lee—but, strangely enough (for she was less awkward than Hattie) she trod so often on

He also tried to dance with Lee.

the toes of his new patent leather shoes that he excused himself and said it was pretty hot for the light fantastic anyways. Lee hadn't liked it; he held her so tight, and his shirt-front breathed in and out against her chin. Her ideas about dancing were rather vague, but she hadn't thought of it as being like that.

Of course they had cake and ginger ale before Joe went home; moist chocolate cake just at bedtime. Mr. Bates smacked his lips over it and talked shop with Joe: this

brand of ginger ale was far and away better than the last if folks'd stand for paying the extra cent. Bernard, still on hand, would beg loudly for more "bictola" and more "gigger-ale," and Joe would turn him upside down.

"Some kid! Well, good night, Mr. Bates and Mrs. Bates. Real pleasant time, I'm sure. 'By, girls; take it easy!"

He would skip down the steps and go clicking off up the street whistling "Everybody's Doing It."

"Don't you think Joe's just elegant?" Hattie would demand in whispers of Lee, when they were abed. "Oh, I think he's the swellest fellow! Why, he treats us just like we were his girls, don't he? I wish I could learn to do that dance good as he does. You asleep *so* quick, Lee? *Lee!"*

No answer at all from the other side of the bed, where Lee, wide awake, turned an unresponsive back upon Hattie.

Mrs. Bates was certainly kind; kinder than the people at Willburg, kinder—yes—than Mamsy. It startled Lee when she reached that conclusion. But she followed out the thought and discovered that Mamsy's frequent indifferences had been infinitely more precious than Mrs. Bates' sentimental services. That was very odd, but perfectly true, Lee decided. She remembered that Mamsy used to say: *"I'm* not going to look for your shoe for you. Where did you put it? Why did you leave it? Hunt it up quick or your breakfast will be cold." Mrs. Bates would actually go down on her plump knees before her overgrown daughter, buttonhook in hand.

"I'll do 'em up for you, dearie. Let Momma, that'll be quicker. Wait a minute, Lee, you can't fasten that, dearie; I'll fix it in just a shake."

Lee would promptly fasten whatever was in question with

all possible haste, feeling, for some reason, very hot and shy, and Mrs. Bates would ruefully exclaim:

"Now why didn't you let me! That's just what I love to do, help these little girlies that can't get along very good."

And Hattie certainly availed herself to the utmost of this spirit of service in her mother!

One afternoon Hattie and Lee were at the Bates store waiting for its proprietor to take them home. It was Saturday and he had taken them on a junket to a place where there was a merry-go-round and a shooting-gallery. He had stopped at the store for a minute on their way home to see if Joe was adequately handling the situation. Lee was still somewhat dazed from the merry-go-round and sat quietly on an empty orange crate at the back of the store. And all at once there spoke at the counter a voice that filled her with the dimly rushing memory of another voice, almost forgotten. There was a cadence in it that stirred something deep-buried and sweet.

"I'd like a pound of best butter, please," it said, "and a jar of strawberry jam."

There was a silence while Mr. Bates himself wrapped up the things (this was one of his best customers), a pause in which the lady might have been looking at the little girls, for suddenly Mr. Bates said in hasty explanation of something:

"My little girl, Mrs. Potter, and a little chum of hers. From Willburg—er—you know." Possibly he supplemented his explanation with a descriptive gesture.

"Oh, yes, I remember Hattie. She's quite a young lady, now, isn't she? And the other small person? What's *your* name?"

"Lee Kelton." The voice was close above her now. She

lifted her chin gallantly and met the lady's eyes unknowingly with a clear gray regard that disconcerted Mrs. Potter somewhat.

"Have—have you got a garden?" Lee inquired suddenly, and then wondered why on earth she had said it.

"A—garden? Why, yes, my dear; why?"

"I don't know," Lee said hastily. "You—you just sounded as if you had, that's all."

"Sounded as if I had a garden! You must have some special magic sort of sense, I think!"

Joe, behind the counter, could not contain a giggle. "That's *good!* What do I sound's if I got, Lee?"

"Do you like gardens?" the lady asked, ignoring him.

"Have you got a garden?" Lee inquired.

"Yes, ma'am," said Lee. "Oh, *yes!*"

"Well! I think you must come and see—come and—and play in mine some day. I have a little girl, Peggy—" Mrs.

Potter fell silent, thinking that it might be an excellent thing for Peggy to play hostess to this wistful-faced child less lucky than herself.

"Poppa, she didn't ask *me*," Hattie protested, when the lady had gone.

"Oh, sure, she meant you to come; you'll see," said Mr. Bates, visibly bulging with gratification that his daughter should be invited to play in the garden of the Elm Street Potters.

But Mrs. Potter hadn't asked Hattie. Her Hupmobile drew up in front of the jigsaw façade of the Bates home some days later, and it departed with Lee only. Mrs. Bates' excuse to her indignant husband was that Hattie had been over to Mildred's when Mrs. Potter came. But no inquiry had been made as to the whereabouts of any one but Lee.

Peggy Potter was ten, and a tomboy. She hitched up her already short blue frock and took a flying leap off her high piazza rail when the Hupmobile stopped at the steps.

"Hello, Mummy, did you get her? Is that her?"

Peggy climbed into the tonneau without bothering to open the door, and, after an anxious scrutiny of Lee's impassive and waiting countenance, said experimentally:

"Hello!"

"How do you do?" said Lee, wondering if she ought to shake hands.

A strong, sudden, little paw seized hers, and Lee was towed with more speed than grace or comfort out of the automobile and up the path.

"Peggy, do have a care!" her mother reminded her. "Try to remember!"

As a safeguard, Mrs. Potter ran lightly up the walk, overtook them, and possessed herself of Lee's other hand.

"Let's go into the garden right away. That's where you wanted to go, isn't it, Lee?"

"Oh, *yes,* Mrs. Potter, ma'am," said Lee.

Lee was towed up the path.

"Never mind the 'ma'am,' " said Mrs. Potter.

It was a real garden, realer, even, than Mamsy's, perhaps. It was rich with the scent of a myriad sun-warm flowers; the close clipped grass was like velvet; cool, living velvet. Lee stooped and touched it unobtrusively.

"You'd like the sundial, perhaps. Let's show her the sundial, Peggy," Mrs. Potter said. "Do you know how it works, Lee?"

"Yes, ma—Mrs. Potter. I think so. Mamsy told me, but she hasn't got one. She wants one. It's like a clock, only shadows on it instead of hands."

"Something like that," Mrs. Potter agreed, wondering who Mamsy was, and hoping Peggy wouldn't ask. She guided

Lee's fingers to the raised Roman numerals on the dial, and told her where the shadow now fell. Lee's hands, searching the warm bronze, came suddenly upon a ring of letters around its edge, and her face lighted with interest and eagerness.

"I could read these! It's like line-type!"

"Can you really? How nice of our old sundial!" Mrs. Potter was looking gravely at Lee, pressed close beside the stone shaft. "I wish they wouldn't put that dreadful great bow on her hair," she thought, "and that miserable quasi-tartan gingham."

Lee was slowly deciphering the bronze letters. " 'Hour—by—hour—I—mark—the—grace—Of—the—sun—upon—my—face.' "

Mrs. Potter, oddly moved, turned sharply about. Her daughter, not similarly affected, offered a diversion at that moment.

"Look where I am, Lee! Oh, I forgot! I'm up on top of the summer-house. Can you come? It's easy—I'll show you—and fun."

Once upon a time Lee had climbed up the trellis and sat upon the bay-window roof of the white house taunting Angela Morton, who dared not follow. She had forgotten that; forgotten to believe, in fact, that such feats could be expected of her. Filled with a mingled shame and pride, she stood awkwardly beside the sundial, wondering if she must confess herself a coward.

"Nonsense, Peggy," said Mrs. Potter hastily; "of course Lee doesn't want to go up there. You *will* break your arms and legs one of these fine days. Come down, and we'll have some tea *inside* the summer-house."

"I want to show Lee the pool," said Peggy, halfway down

the rustic post. "Oh, bother! There goes a hole in my dress again, Mummy."

"That one you shall mend yourself," said Mrs. Potter distinctly. "Don't take Lee *into* the pool, Peggy."

Peggy galloped Lee off across the smooth lawn and ducked unexpectedly under a low hemlock branch which smote Lee across the face.

"Oh, I'm *sorry!*" cried Peggy, contrite. "I'm *awfully* sorry! I keep forgetting. Here's the pool; don't go any farther or you'll fall in. The nicest thing to do is to lie on your tum and dabble."

Peggy demonstrated, and Lee lay down carefully beside her on the smooth stone coping, and they dabbled. The water was warm; it passed through Lee's fingers in long vibrating swirls as she swung her arm to and fro.

"There are goldfish in it," Peggy informed her, "and lilies. If you'll keep your hand still and just wag your finger a wee bit a fish'll prob'ly come and peck at it."

Lee followed these directions and was presently duly pecked by the round mouth of a curious goldfish.

"He's funny—and nice," said Lee softly, smiling.

She was loving everything—the quiet, the fragrance, the wind in high treetops, the frank fearless child beside her, and she could say nothing. They must think she didn't like it after all, their wonderful, beautiful garden. She didn't know what to say to Peggy and her mother—Lee, whose tongue at the white house had rarely been still.

Later she drank lemonade and ate buttered scones in the garden-house, her feet neatly crossed, her plate at a careful angle. When Mrs. Potter took her back to the Bates' home, she said: "Thank you," and again: "Thank you!" That was all.

Mrs. Potter, that evening, told her husband, who was interested in the whole incident, as he was interested in all that his wife did.

"Poor little person, I don't think she really enjoyed it. I don't suppose she got much impression; what could one, you know, without seeing it? I suppose it's really unwise to give such children just a whiff of another environment if it can't keep on. Peggy, *please* don't balance your bread that way; it's bound to go on the floor."

"Mummy," Peggy declared, having bolted the bread to save argument, "she did like it, I think. She kept smiling little smiles around the edges all the time, like when the goldfish bit her and when we showed her the day-lilies."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Potter. "Oh, dear. Jim—I don't know—it seemed too nice a face, somehow, to grow up mediocre, but, well, I wasn't exactly *disappointed,* but—"

"Dear idealist," said her husband, reaching his hand across the table and putting it over hers, "you see a potential swan in every last lorn gosling, don't you! Even this one over here in the torn dress."

Naturally Peggy had to strangle him for that. Her hugs were really a menace to wind and limb!

Lee escaped Joe and the jazz that evening. She couldn't or wouldn't tell the Bates family anything it wanted to know. She would say, in fact, little except that she had had a good time and that the garden was pretty.

"Do they live real swell?" Mrs. Bates questioned in an eager undertone. "Was there a lot of help bringing the tea and all that?"

"We had lemonade. I don't know who brought it; Peggy passed it around."

"Peggy—that's the kid. Was she all dressed up? I should imagine Mrs. Potter would put elegant clothes on that young one—the only one, you know. Did you get a chance to feel of her dress, Lee?"

"No. She slid off the roof of the summer-house and tore it. She had to mend it herself."

"My *land!* Wouldn't you think a rich woman like Mrs. Potter'd have a seamstress right there to do all things like that? Is the house grand inside, Lee, swell rugs and drapes and like that?"

"We didn't go inside."

"Dear! I wish I'd had your chance! Of course you couldn't tell s'much about it anyway, though. Where are you going—where's the child going? Lee! *Lee*-ee! We're going to have a lovely dish of nut fudge out on the porch right off. Joe's coming over."

But Lee went to bed, and there wept. Occasional strains from the victrola and Joe's cackling laugh reached her even so. She was sure Mrs. Potter would not ask her again to the fairy tale garden. She had had what she had so long dreamed of, and known not what to do with it. She had stood stiffly beside enchanted flowers and not dared to touch or smell them. Why hadn't she romped with Peggy and told her all the whimsical fancies that crowded her brain and followed her up to the top of the summer-house? She did not know, and wept the more bitterly.

The truth was that a sense of inferiority—physical, mental, social—had kept her awkward and tongue-tied. She was a blind child from an institution; Peggy was the free-spirited member of a cultured household. That Lee had once been the equally normal member of an equally enlightened household, she had so far forgotten that her

dim memory of it served her to little purpose other than to make her vaguely unhappy and ill at ease. She had forgotten that she had ever seen with every other sense she possessed, and understood the beauty of life with a mind fed constantly by illustration and illusion. She realized, of course, none of this, and thought she wept because a halting "Thank you" was such insufficient payment for a step within the magic and long-barred gates.

Mrs. Potter didn't come again. She really meant to, but the next time she asked after Mr. Bates' little boarder she was told that Lee and Hattie had gone back to school.

The vacation was over. Mrs. Bates had swamped them both with embraces and loaded them with boxes and bags of lunch sufficient to feed the whole car, and Bernard had thrust his own lollypop generously and determinedly into his sister's mouth just as the train came in, thereby causing a last-moment panic and very nearly the loss of the train. Hattie, still gasping and coughing, was hauled aboard by the conductor, and Buryville dropped behind the train and out of Lee's life.

At Willburg Lee, prompted by a strange sense of relief and security, embraced Mrs. Darrah, to the worthy woman's surprise, and said:

"Oh, I'm *glad* to be back at school!"

"Happy to hear it, I'm sure," Mrs. Darrah said. "Hope you're going to work hard. Well, it's always pleasant to see the family back again."

It was pleasant: Jill, starved for Lee; Mary Ellen, grown several inches and benignly friendly; Miss Ferrin, full of stories about the mountains where she had spent the summer; Miss Blum, refreshed by her outing, making unwonted pleasantries; even the superintendent coming in and sitting

on the edge of a desk and cracking academic jokes. It was home. Lee's heart warmed to all these people she had learned to live with.

"Oh," she said to Mrs. Darrah, "I'd much rather be at school than at a home."

"A home? What's the child mean, an asylum? I should think so!"

"No, no, I mean a *home,* a lovely home, like you said Hattie had."

"Oh! Merciful lands! Well, you always were a kind of a funny one. There's no accounting for folks in this world!"

Only Mr. Lamson seemed unrefreshed by his vacation. His mouth was more tense and his stride more nervous than ever. But he tried his best not to blaze out at his pupils; and when Lee, rejoiced to be once more within reach of a piano, labored for him without resentment, he often grew strangely gentle and took ten minutes from her practice time that she might come and listen to him and the organ glorifying Beethoven.

XI

So the world, which was Willburg, went on. There were few letters from Mamsy. Nothing new, and of the old memories nothing very beautiful left. But there were lessons, and Lee worked because there was little else to do. She completely stopped seeking for hypothetical adventure around every corner and followed without deviation the circumscribed routine. A wakening interest in abstract knowledge gradually supplanted a little the loss of faith in actual things. She learned, surprisingly, the victorious satisfac-

tion of mastering a mathematical problem or a difficult bit of harmony.

Her legs now being long enough to reach the pedal keys, she began studying the organ, which, in itself, presented sufficient problems to put all others out of her head. Perched on the edge of the high bench, her feet striving uncertainly to push the right pedals, her hands compassing as many manuals as she could negotiate, she spent much time lost in forbidden and fascinating experiments, alone in the big assembly room, till the next practicer, clattering up on the platfrom, shooed her off to a class, or Mr. Lamson came up noiselessly with a scathing reproof about waiting till little wings were stronger.

She sang in the Lower Choir, and those Sunday mornings were very precious. On week days the whole school shouted a hymn in unison during chapel, but on Sundays more elaborate psalms and anthems, practiced throughout the week, were sung in the very best technique of the two choirs. The assembly room seemed then like Lee's idea of a cathedral. The superintendent's deep voice would drop into silence. ". . . as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen." Then the click of Mr. Lamson's baton for the choir to rise, the swelling sound of the organ, the sober voices of the biggest boys, just settling into the tones of young manhood, taking up the first notes of the anthem. Lee would wait, her heart bursting, for the tap that told the altos to come in. The sopranos caught the air, leaped with it like seraphs, with the murmurous rhythm of the tenors behind; then the altos, and Lee would find herself singing at last, singing in space that seemed limitless, with the crowding beauty of music all around her.

"They have laid a net, a net for my feet, and pressed down my soul; they have digged a pit before me and are fallen, are fallen into the midst of it themselves. . . ." Then the measured young baritones—"My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise. . . ." Lee could hardly wait for the clarion cry of the organ that gave her leave to shout the next verse. "Awake, my glory! Awake, lute and harp! I myself will awake right early! Awake! Awake!" The whole choir singing splendidly, the organ pealing above all. . . . Oh, it was not easy to go back into the stuffy corridors, to the stale outworn diversions of the playroom.

Jill would find Lee as they trooped out of the assembly hall.

"Oh, sometimes I could hear you just above everybody! Lee, you do sing so grand!"

Jill still clung, her worship unfaltering. Lee might have been an angel singing for Jill. In fact, she would have cared far less about the angel.

So back into the playroom to sit on stiff chairs and read familiar books and wrangle and giggle till dinner time, with its unfailing boiled mutton and mashed potatoes and turnips and half-melted lemon water-ice; and Sunday would come to its end. Tomorrow would bring classes and practicing and a careful walk in the courtyard, and the interminable repetition of the girls' chattering confidences. So Willburg—which was the world, a blind world—went on.

XII

It was in March of that year—the year Lee was twelve—that the letter came which told her no one would ever see

Mrs. Ramsey again. Her first thought was of Mamsy's loneliness. She struggled with memories four years old, of a quick kind voice, a stir of soft skirts, a faint warm smell of orris-root. No image of the white house could be quite complete without that gracious and all-wise presence somehow woven within it. Lee's memories were shadowy, but her grief was quick and real. She fled to the classroom (without permission) to find her slate that she might write words of swift sympathy to Mamsy.

"Well, I've been looking for you all over. Come right along to the sitting-room; your folks are here." It was Mrs. Darrah stopping her.

But the letter still lay in her hand, saying that one of her "folks" had been taken from her. Could it be that Mamsy had come on the heels of her message, that they might share sadness? It was still the instant reaction.

"Mamsy?" She had not spoken the word for long.

"No, no, your real folks. Your poppa and your brother. They came way down from the mountains to see you. My sakes, what you been *crying* for?" Mrs. Darrah wiped Lee's cheeks hastily with an apron-corner. "Never do to have your folks see that."

Lee stumbled beside Mrs. Darrah down the unfamiliar way to the sitting-room in a still daze. Out of long ago she remembered that Anne had told her of somebody—a father, a personage unreal and mysterious, who lived far, far away in the mountains. She had classed him with the pleasant people of fairy tales, mythical and remote; the mountains had lent him romance and unreality. It was impossible that he should be sitting in the parlor at Willburg like other girls' visiting fathers.

John Henry had been impressed by Willburg—perhaps

too vigorously—that it was his duty at least to come and view his daughter's progress even if he was unable to assist in it. So, traveling part way with jogging tobacco farmers, and hoarding long for the first railway journey of his life, he achieved his goal and sat on the edge of a plush chair in the Willburg parlor turning his hat feebly in his hands. Sid, grown to be a lank boy of thirteen, stood stiff and frowning beside him. Their eyes held the door with a fixed timidity.

"Well, Mr. Kelton, this is your Lee."

Did there flash back across John Henry the memory of a smoldering weary gaze lifted for a moment; the decisive statement in a weakened voice:

"I aim hit should be this one's called name; Lee Kelton, and don't you ferget hit."

The element of obscurity about his mission became suddenly clarified for him. This *was* his daughter, and no mistake. But more than her name told him so.

"So that's my little gal—my little darter. Yes, there's a look of yore maw on you, some ways."

He lapsed into awkward silence. He held out his hand toward her and dropped it in embarrassment when she made no move to take it.

"Air you feared of me, Lee?"

He had forgotten that she could not see him. Mrs. Darrah led her forward and laid her hand on his knee.

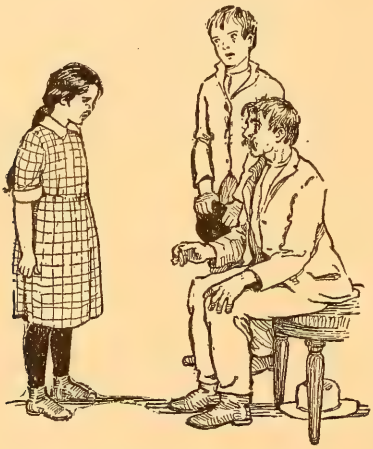
"Are you my father?" Lee asked.

"For sure," John Henry said eagerly. "And this here is Sid, yore brother, that were no more'n a babe when you went away."

Sid indicated his presence by a creaking monosyllable and continued his fascinated staring at his sister. Her

puzzled hands were flitting across her father's rough clothes from which came the acrid odor of hickory-smoke and tobacco.

"I cain't noways recollect she hain't any sight in her eyes," he said to Mrs. Darrah, perhaps forgetting that she did have hearing in her ears.



"Air you feared of me, Lee?"

But it was some sort of dream, or a stupid joke, perhaps. The other girls' fathers were like this: Lee had heard them in the corridors at vacation time. Not her father, who lived among blue mountains and was like Mamsy and a king in a fairy tale. But then fairy tales were long past.

"Do you live in the mountains?" she asked at last.

"For sure," John Henry assented again. "Way back yan. You was born thar, Lee."

Facts pinned her down. She had no wish for reality to

form about her. She had never given a thought to her birthplace. The man's slow, strange voice went on.

"They're doin' by you. I heerd you air gittin' larnin'."

"Why don't you read for your father?" Mrs. Darrah suggested.

Lee grasped the book that was slipped into her hands; her fingers mechanically sought the first words she came to. She rattled off a page of *The Man Without a Country* while John Henry's eyes followed spellbound her flying hands.

"And I cain't seek out and foller book-words as quick as that. Hit's plain wonderful!"

It was a long day. Lee took her father lightly by one rough, gaunt hand and showed him and Sid around the institution. He thought it a palace of luxury and elegance, and impressed this very solemnly upon Lee. He wanted to be sure that she appreciated her advantages. He was beginning to feel a vast gratitude to the state slowly shaping within him. She was being given things he had only dimly dreamed of. A child, and without sight, she already had more "larning" than he would ever attain.

They went back to the close parlor and sat each on the edge of a chair. Sid had in no way manifested himself throughout the day. It made Lee nervous to feel a constant presence with neither voice nor form. She longed to tear away something that might reveal him. At last John Henry studied, not the high clock, but the westering sun beyond the window.

"Sunball's drappin'," he said. "We must go on, little gal. You hain't so little, though. But not as big as Sid."

Growing in understanding of her means of sight, he guided her hand awkwardly to the boy's lean shoulder, and

Sid shrank back a little. He was thoroughly awed and overcome by the whole expedition. Lee felt the motion and dropped her hand.

"Shame upon you, Sid Kelton," said John Henry. "Good-by, darter. I'm glad we come. I aimed to do it long ago. It takes a sight o' money; I'm afeared it'll be long-an'-ever." Then his face lightened with real eagerness, a new thought. "But mebbe now yo're gittin' such a big one you kin come to us! 'Twould be a pure pleasure havin' a woman-person 'round agin—and a holp, too."

He twisted his hat into new shapelessness. She looked to him so like Kate, standing there strangely proud and silent. That was pity, that she couldn't see; but they'd reared her wonderful handy here; she could wash up the dishes, sure, and maybe holp with the flour-vittles a man-person had such a time with.

"Yas," he pursued, "I hadn't hardly thought upon it. When yore schoolin's done you'll be travelin' home to yore pappy, won't ye?"

He kissed her cheek fumblingly, and this time, taken unaware, it was she who shrank involuntarily.

He went. Counting his diminished money in the train, he found himself wonderfully content. Lee with the beauty her mother had had when he courted her, book-larning, clean calico dresses; fine, soft, red chairs, a house good enough for the President himself—a beneficent state providing all this, supporting and training her till she was old enough to come back and be a holp and a comfort on the mountain. To be sure, he had rather less than nothing with which to support her, but old Cousin Ebby of the snuff-stick was gone now, and the amount of pones and coffee that had fed her would doubtless sustain Lee. John Henry's head

nodded rhythmically with the jolt of the train. His hand crept up and loosened the tight neckband of his boiled shirt. He snored gently and happily. Sid sat rigid beside him with fearful eyes fixed unwinkingly on the darkening landscape that fled past with shrieking rapidity.

Lee did not fall asleep so easily as her father. Many troubled things tormented her wakefulness. The white house lonely, Mamsy with no one to love or to love her, that barely remembered voice behind the steaming silver coffee-pot. . . . Then, another voice, harsh and drawling, the scratch of an unshaven cheek, this strange, terrifying relationship come to fill the place the other had left. . . . No, no! Growing and torturing was the knowledge that her brother had shrunk from her blindness; and above all, the haunting realization of those last words of her father's: "When yore schoolin's done you'll be travelin' home to yore pappy." Was this what lay at the end of the road? Though her imagination could not have pictured the slovenly state of the Kelton cabin, her birthplace, her lawful abode, yet well enough she knew that Hattie's home was indeed lovely in comparison with it. What would life be like with this rough, strange man, and this silent boy who was repelled by her?

She had hardly ever considered what her life was to be after her years at Willburg were done. Vague ambitions had at times drifted across her fancy, to sing before thousands, to go to foreign lands, to find Mamsy again—daydreams all. Miss Blum had told her often enough that she'd never make a success of manual work, and that if she could teach blind children their notes she'd be lucky. Teaching music in an institution—that had seemed a rather dreary outlook for the rest of one's life! Lee had gloomily con-

sidered Miss Blum's statements and then laughed at them. But this! Face to face with stark actuality, Lee found herself aghast and filled with blank dread. All the rest of her life! This man was truly her own father; they all said so. He could make her do whatever he wanted. She would have to live with him and Sid on a mountain-top, washing his dishes, sweeping his floor, listening to his raucous drawl. "Way back yan . . ." It conveyed incredible remoteness, somehow. Lee fancied these people—quite rightly—living in complete isolation. All the rest of her life! She did not wish for more of life if it had nothing more than this to offer.

The organ, the singing, no longer gave her joy; all this would be taken away. She moved in a brooding, ominous atmosphere of her own creation, telling no one of her fear. It became a dismal obsession, crowding everything else from her mind. Poor John Henry's uncouthness became magnified tenfold by exaggerated memory till he loomed like an ogre beside Lee. He would come, perhaps this very summer. Where was she to spend the vacation? June was drawing perilously near. She put the question fearfully to Mrs. Darrah. "Oh, I don't know as we've thought yet." That was all the comfort she got from that.

And there were no letters from Mamsy. Just a postcard from New York, where poor Anne was trying to sell some pictures and forget her mother and the white house for a time. So far had Mamsy withdrawn from Lee's spirit that she would not have dreamed of writing to her of the fear and hopelessness. She had not even mentioned her father's visit in any of the duty letters she had written during the months that followed it.

She ate, drank, slept, worked, and practiced, mechanically

and automatically, with the precision of four years' training. Willburg was a long and perfectly straight road between high walls, and at the end of it stood John Henry Kelton's cabin with its door open. Ah, twelve, at best, is a difficult, despondent, introspective age to go through without a real cause for gloom and apprehension! Lee was very much to be pitied—but Mrs. Darrah only gave her quinine and iron after every meal.

XIII

Anne Ramsey walked quickly up the hill that rose above the town of Willburg to the unadorned gray building that crowned it. Through her suffocating excitement it appealed to her dramatic sense that she was arriving quite unheralded. She paused to catch her breath and quiet her ridiculously pounding heart.

In New England early June had barely uncurled the first young leaves. Here the few dusty trees were dark green and broad-foliaged. Summer sunshine baked the flags of the courtyard which she entered. She stopped again to look long at the bulk of Willburg Institution for the Blind, challenging her mutely. Then she saw the barred windows, the forbidding wall, and closed her eyes for a moment.

"Great Heavens!" she said. "Four years! Four years and a half!"

But Anne too often looked at things from only one angle. The bars were really rather sensible in some ways. An insult to Lee, perhaps, but a kindly guardian to Miss Lulu Jones, to whom open second-story windows were only another kind of door.

Anne was entangled with necessary business in the office,

and spent a restless hour in conversation with the superintendent. It had to be, but the cup of Tantalus seemed poised before her dry lips. The superintendent himself took her to Miss Blum's room at last. Classes were changing noisily; a silence fell as the revered and seldom heard voice of the high executive asked for Lee Kelton. Anne looked vaguely about. Dusty sunlight, scratched desks, drooping potted geraniums, blank, commonplace little faces . . . four years.

"She's practicin'." Two or three voices hastened to give the information.

"I'll send some one for her," Miss Blum volunteered grudgingly.

"Couldn't I go to her?" Anne suggested from her dream.

"Why, if you wish. Jill, you may take this lady to the assembly room."

A small wisp of a person detached herself from the group and came to the doorway. So this was Jill! Anne had heard much of her in disjointed letters. She almost recoiled now; Jilll, externally, would never be beautiful. She slid a shy, wraith-like hand into Anne's and led her with no uncertain step down long, dim corridors of bewildering complexity.

"Did you come to see Lee, ma'am?" The question was unnecessary, but polite.

"Yes; from very far away."

Jill suddenly clapped a hand over her mouth to stifle an incredulous squeak.

"O-oh! Could you be—"

"Could I be what?" Anne's mind was on these terrible, bare walls that had sheltered Lee for this eternity. Iron and steel . . .

"Mamsy!"

Anne started. The child's voice was trembling with hope for her adored.

"Yes," said Anne; "I'm Lee's Mamsy."

Jill became a leaping soundless shadow.

"Oh, I'm so glad, glad, glad!"

"Why glad, little person?"

"Because she'll be!" Jill whispered as she pushed open a door.

The rolling sound of prolonged chords shook the silence now. Jill pulled Anne down toward her.

"She's up there practicing. You—you c'n find her now."

"O-oh, could you be—Mamsy?"

And she turned and fled, quivering, with outstretched hands, back to the classroom.

This was a long, high hall, half lighted by narrow windows. Row upon row of smooth, empty benches made a

rather forbidding foreground. The fine organ raised a phalanx of tarnished golden pipes across the end. One person looked very small, alone there. Anne sat down on the nearest bench because her heart and her knees were behaving in a shameful manner. She looked blankly at the high windows, the dim gray walls, the back of the person who sat so far off playing the organ. The girl held a splendid bass chord with one hand, and flung a chestnut braid back over her shoulder with the other. But Lee had no braid! Her face was framed with ruddy tendrils, smooth and shimmering at the crown, flicking back crisply at the ends. Flying hair—blue frock—half-past seven. No, that was ridiculous, of course. In four years any one might acquire a long braid. But suppose it was a mistake. Suppose it wasn't Lee at all there on the organ bench. Jill had been sure—but Jill couldn't see.

Anne tiptoed forward to the very edge of the platform. The music was thrilling—the simplest of chords, yet, invoked from the organ, they became magnified, glorified. The air was filled; there was an intolerable drowning about Anne's ears. This was quite a big girl. She wore a plaid gingham dress not quite large enough for her. Her gleaming braid was secured at the end by a serviceable elastic band. Anne crept up the steps at the side of the platform and studied the profile bent above the keyboard. Oh, preposterous, that she should not be sure. What could four years do that would rob her of certainty? Naturally she could not expect to find a child of seven and a half!

The girl stopped playing, considered for a moment, and then something faintly amused came into her face. The organ gave forth an unseemly jig tune, and across the nose of the player appeared a small, ridiculous wrinkle. She

turned a little, and Anne met for an instant the clear and unchanged regard of deep gray eyes beneath a clean, straight line of brow. That was Lee; no doubting now, possibly.

There was complete, suffocating silence.

And yet, something had happened around the mouth. All the expression her eyes were unable to hold had been wont to flash there, but now it was without expression. Anne stood close beside the bench, wordless. The music stopped in the middle of a bar.

"Is somebody here?" the player demanded sharply.

"Yes," said Anne.

Lee grew utterly quiet, tense. She had only half expected an answer—and that farther away than this low, mysterious word next her ear. She spoke uncertainly.

"Do you want to practice? What time is it anyway?"

Anne, for reply, covered one of Lee's hands with her own. There was complete, suffocating silence. Lee sat with face

averted, slowly fingering the hand that had closed over hers—a long hand, cool and firm. There was a curious ring upon it; her fingers paused there. A thousand times in something far away and forgotten she had turned that ring. Jade and silver—silver and jade; jade like the inside of a wave, cold and quiet; silver like the moon, still and shining. Long buried images sang dimly. Terror and confusion grew in Lee's face; it would be horrible to make a mistake, to build such an assumption from one low word and the touch of a hand. Dared she risk it—if she breathed it almost inaudibly?

"Mamsy. . . ."

But Ann heard. It was all she had been waiting for in the drowning silence. Then stifling embraces, torrents of captive words released. Then the sudden quieting, the inevitable feeling that each was talking to a stranger. They left the assembly room hand in hand, silent after all.

Lee was by turns incoherent with joy and stricken with shyness and doubt. Long withheld natural expression struggled with the well-drilled forms of Willburg—and Willburg won. Feeling infinitely lonely and out of place, Anne watched Lee click back automatically into the routine of the classroom, hands neatly folded in front of her, head held forward with the careful rigidity of the blind. The child who four years ago had danced "Queen Mary" with gay abandon in Miss Ferrin's circle was gone completely. Class must go on; discipline triumphed. Only an occasional spasmodic smile, too quickly begun, too abruptly ended, marked that anything out of the way had happened to Lee. Anne sat watching all the faces. Lee recited with admirable composure that in 1857 James Buchanan became President; and Jill, who was not in Lee's

class, stopped fingering her leaden arithmetic symbols to listen to the voice she loved. But Anne scarcely recognized the voice. It was still low and round, but the buoyancy was gone, the whimsical lift and fall. Ann found herself wondering what an outward metamorphosis would do—hair cut to a moyen-âge pattern, a straight apricot-colored frock. That would be external, of course, but it might bring back to the eye, at least, something of the Lee who had gone.

Anne was to spend the night in the infirmary—Willburg's only guest-room happily unoccupied—and next day they were to leave for the North. The summer holiday was to begin next week, but there would be no fall term opening for Lee. She was beginning slowly to understand that. The thing she had long ago forgotten to wish for was to happen; she was going home. Going home—home to the white house, not to her father's cabin. There would not even be Willburg any more. By cautious and indirect questioning she found out these things. Mamsy was still too new and strange to her to be made a confidante. For so many years there had been nobody who would really understand; she had forgotten that Mamsy had completely understood. So she kept even her present dazed relief secret. She was not to be altogether free of the mental menace of John Henry for some time, however.

She piloted Mamsy through the intricacies of Willburg, gave her a peep even into the forbidden unknown of the boys' wing, towed her finally to Miss Ferrin's little room in One-A corridor. It still smelled of pine-needles, and hazily Lee remembered cool water on eyes tortured with weeping, and something that had been given her to lead her away from naughtiness. Miss Ferrin put a small kettle over the flame of a can of solidified alcohol and dispatched Lee to

commandeer bread and butter from Mrs. Darrah. Miss Ferrin sat very straight and neat beside her open window.

"I hoped," she said, "that either you would never come or that you would come before it was too late."

"Am I too late?" Anne asked humbly.

"No," said Miss Ferrin. "I think you can kindle it again, if you will. I'm not at all sure, you know, that you're wise—playing with fire. But what you started it is your duty to finish."

Ann stared at the wan blue flame beneath the kettle.

"Forgive me for talking to you so," Miss Ferrin said. "But the time is so short, and I've thought a great deal of you both since Lee has been with us."

This was the woman whom Anne had jealously censured long ago when she had written seemingly cruel advice. Wisdom and patience that had never failed throughout twenty-four discouraging years of teaching blind children looked out steadily from her brave, tired eyes.

"I wish she might have stayed with me," Miss Ferrin said. "I lose touch with my children when they leave me. A big school is just a machine, you know, Miss Ramsey. One cog in it can only spin around with the gears. I'm a cog, you see."

It was some time before Lee blundered in with a plate of bread and made a sudden silence by her entry. She waited for Miss Ferrin's invitation, and then sat cautiously on the edge of a chair, inflexible and withdrawn. She answered Anne, "Yes, Miss Ramsey," "No, Miss Ramsey," and Anne sought helplessly Miss Ferrin's pale, contained face bent above the teacups. "You can kindle it again if you will. . . ." Anne, who had arrived in such a blaze of cer-

tainty, found herself clinging to that assurance. Reality was a thing so much more vast and complex than the world of fancy where Anne had spent so many of her lonely days. She had, unthinkingly, expected to join on where she had left off four and a half years ago. But the threads were not so easily to be picked up; they were intricately knotted and tangled. With no initiative, no assurance, no apparent anticipation, Lee merely stood about with her hands folded and a neat smile carved upon her face waiting for whatever might happen next. She might have been a respectful servant, or something even as unresponsive as a traveling-bag ready to be picked up. She gave Anne no clew to the tumult of bewildered emotion that surged within her—still afraid of saying the wrong thing, making the wrong move, spoiling everything. Safer to keep still when silence was easy and adequate speech so difficult.

Anne, lying awake in the little infirmary which smelled faintly of carbolic through the hot darkness, thought about Willburg. This place that during four years had been a myth, an unreality, food for speculation, had now become concrete and definite about her. "Iron and steel," she had thought at once, hemmed in as soon as she crossed its threshold by the rigid rules that dominated it. She amended and added to her opinion now; it was something other than the inflexible institution routine that lent to the place its curious air of eerie abnormality. This was a blind world. Its seeing members were a tiny minority; its every action was built upon blindness.

Willburg boasted that it turned out self-supporting graduates, and had time and again proved its boast true. But were they citizens of the sighted world? That was what

Anne wondered, remembering the stiff, awkward, unnatural girls she had met that afternoon, the shy, uncouth lads she had watched at their basketry benches. Lee had herself become a stiff, awkward, unnatural girl. Anne wondered suddenly, with a sinking of the heart, whether it was impossible to make of a blind person an acceptable citizen of the world. She remembered, then, consolingly, the unfettered child who had played about the white house; remembered a charming and talented blind lady—a poet of much ability—whom she had met years before. Anne was really uninformed; she had few weapons to range before the sudden doubts Willburg had forced upon her, but she brought them all to bear, fortified by her own indomitable idealism.

The fault must lie, in part, with this institution. A blind world. But of necessity; how could it be otherwise? Here there could be no competition with the seeing, no contact with the multitudinous standards of the vast world outside. Half-comprehended hearsay—what was that with which to meet, suddenly, the extremes of coldness and compassion that awaited the graduate without? Though these children at Willburg received less consideration than would probably have been shown them by too-fond friends in the world, yet the whole scheme of existence in the institution was framed to meet their need. It was more expedient. But blindness was here the usual, not the extraordinary, state of being. When, in later years, the tables should be turned, would these young people find themselves equipped to take their place in a sighted civilization, or would they be relegated to workshops and lodging-houses for blind wage-earners—to pass, then, all their lives in an abnormal world, blind of body and spirit?

Anne wondered, and, wondering, fell asleep at last. All night there hung above her pillow the haunting weight of her problem, this new Lee that was to be hers. She might carp all she pleased at the blindness that pervaded Willburg, but, after all, was she fitted for the great, or even impossible, task of lifting Lee into a life perhaps not designed for her? Anne slept uneasily and woke before the rising bell to stare vaguely at mustard-colored walls and a framed print of Raphael's Cherubs and wonder whether or no she was still dreaming.

Jill hovered like Lee's shadow about the packing—not that there was much of it. Most of Lee's belongings were the property of the state. Anne faced in consternation the prospect of Lee's traveling in a shrunken plaid dress and a faded red straw hat. All the clothes she had sent from time to time were long since outgrown and passed on; she saw them, with a shock, incongruously adorning smaller inmates of Willburg.

"Jill, I'll write to you; honestly I will." Lee knew uncomfortably that solace would be needed. "Are you sorry I'm going?"

"No," Jill cried stoutly, patting with unsteady fingers the starched sleeve of Lee's clean dress. "No, I'm glad! You're going to go home! I'm glad, Lee, I'm awful glad; oh, I'm glad!"

And she continued to say it, in a shrill breathless crescendo, even after the footsteps had died away across the hot stone courtyard, and the iron gate of Willburg had closed with a creak and clash behind departing figures. As if by the repeated incantation she could keep back heartbreak. She gabbled it over and over.

"Oh, I'm glad—I'm glad—I'm glad—I'm glad—" until her voice broke completely before the oncoming rush of her tears.

XIV

Even the outer change was not so easily accomplished. It needed more than the binding back of loosened hair with a narrow band of black velvet, more than the donning of a russet frock tricked about with peacock-colored designs. In fact these seemed, if anything, to make more incongruous and apparent the institution mannerisms that smote Anne hourly. Likewise, Anne found it much harder than she had anticipated to say, "Oh, *don't* fold your hands over your tummy!" Even Lee's smile—of all things about her most joyous and spontaneous—had undergone a change. She now treated it as something to be stifled and checked if possible, a physical contortion of the face, like a yawn, to be concealed and got over with as quickly as could be. She no longer turned toward a person to whom she spoke, but fixedly addressed one spot in the atmosphere, as though to alter the position of her head might seriously derange her anatomy.

And the inner change was perhaps more baffling. She met Anne's eager descriptions of the vivid June days with a guarded apathy. She asked no questions about the living landscape that hummed with ripening summer around her. She sat in one corner of the living-room crocheting an ugly bag which she had brought with her from Willburg. She was feeling her way; unsure of her place in this household, unsure of Mamsy's relation, unsure even of her own memories. What had gone dimly beside her all these years was

only the shadowy recollection of a delightful whole. She could not instantly regain appreciation of the details of life at the white house. There was a growing sense of peace and security, of confidence in Miss Ramsey (who still wanted to be called Mamsy), but actually to understand and enjoy the new life she needed a re-education almost as great and

She sat in one corner crocheting an ugly bag.

gradual as the transition between her dark and empty babyhood and the normal, eager years of her early childhood.

Anne, puzzled and checked, did by chance the wisest thing she could have done. The white house she found still too full of memories of her mother for her own courage; she packed a trunk and took herself and Lee to the seashore. Lee had heard much about the sea in the old days, but she had never been near it. Anne turned her loose on an unpopulated sweep of beach that cut a white horseshoe across an infinity of emerald water. She left her alone with bigness

and the sound and smell of salt water and the windy calling of terns. Anne pretended to sketch, and pondered far more than she painted, lying hat over eyes in a warm hollow of beach grass and sand. She thought she was holding something stationary, gaining time for herself in which to think out a plan of action, keeping Lee safe and neutral; not realizing that the very influences she was trying to marshal in her mind were already beating about Lee's spirit in the solitude.

They camped out in one of a row of weather-beaten bungalows that squatted along the edge of the dunes. No sharp-eyed promoter had as yet seen in this beach possibilities of turning each grain of sand to gold by the installation of roller-coasters and dance-halls. The few inhabitants of the little settlement pursued the elusive lobster as their profession, and eked out their livelihood by renting the unoccupied houses to certain select members of civilization in summer. A lean and solitary playwright was there completing a drama for a run in New York, and a tired sculptor and his family were inviting their souls in one of the shacks. The two small children hopped in the dunes like sand-fleas; their mother dressed them in strange-hued garments of burlap, and they grew daily browner of face and tawnier of hair and wilder of manner.

Anne and Lee had the farthest house, a simple dwelling consisting of two rooms and a lean-to porch. They knocked the sand out of their shoes at night and it sifted conveniently through the cracks of the living-room floor. They hung their wet bathing-suits over their sunbleached front step, and ranged their cans of soup with naïve impartiality beside their tin of tooth-powder. It was intimate, yet immense; close companionship in a big place; it was for Lee

utterly different from anything that had ever happened to her. The matter of food alone. . . . Food was stereotyped at Willburg. There were echoing bells, a shouted grace; food appeared, to be eaten as quickly and silently as possible. In the shack each meal was an adventure. Lee learned to wield a can-opener, to scour a skillet with sand. The smell and sound of frying bacon became deliciously linked with the sound and smell of the sea. And the great spaces of the beach compelled freedom. She might run with no fear of hitting a treacherous doorway, fling herself headlong and strike nothing, ever, but warm, yielding sand. Without self-consciousness she might turn her face up toward the high whistling of gulls, throw out her arms into space so vast that her gesture would attract no attention whatever.

XV

They had taken the materials for their supper half a mile down the beach to a hollow under a steep, triangular dune from which the line of the sea was patterned by moving grasses. Lee had gathered all the bits of driftwood she stumbled upon and the fire was snapping into its first flame behind a break of stones.

"Is it fun?" Anne wanted to know.

"Oceans of fun!" Lee agreed heartily.

"You know how big 'oceans of fun' are now, don't you?"

But did she? Anne looked from end to end of the horizon, softening with dusk. Could she ever know?

Darkness was upon them before the meal was over. Lee, unconcerned, went about her business of scouring the pan and gathering together the utensils. Then Anne threw a driftlog on the embers and they sprawled side by side on

the cool, shifting sand, wrapped in keen stillness that was only broken by the crackle of the kindled wood and the rhythmic roar and retreat of the surf.

"Have you forgotten stars, Lee?" Anne asked diffidently. She had forced no pictures upon her of late.

"Are they out?" Lee asked.

"Let's make the shapes of the constellations."

"Coming out; the big ones. Altair in the east, Arcturus over head."

"Nice names," Lee murmured.

"Aren't they! Aquila, the eagle—" Anne sat up suddenly. "Look, dear heart, let's make the shapes of the constellations."

With round, smooth pebbles she plotted on the sand the kite-shaped form of Boötes, Aquila's rough arrowhead, the familiar pattern of the Dipper, the great cross of Cygnus. Under the still shining of the starry company Lee's hand traced the counterpart of their formation.

"The big one is Deneb, in Cygnus." The words seemed to fascinate her. "Vega, Queen of Heaven; Gemma, the pearl of the Crown . . ."

"It's so still," she said. "It seems as if there was nothing else."

"There is nothing else," Anne said. She swept Lee's hand from horizon to zenith. "Emptiness filled with vast, far-off shining. Cygnus stretches from here to here; Serpens winds clear across the whole space above you. The sea is low, flat, far down; I can barely see the faint stirring of the grass against a dim line of foam."

Lee was silent. Was it true; that was the trouble. Wouldn't it be as easy to imagine this vastness, this swarming of infinite distant suns anywhere else? No, it would have been impossible to hang the ceiling of Willburg with stars; there must be something intrinsic, then—truth bigger than words. The fire hummed a small near tune in the midst of infinitude. Lee drew close to Anne.

"Mamsy, is there bigness you can feel, just like bigness you can see?"

"Indeed, yes! Don't you feel it now?"

"I was thinking I did," Lee said. Presently she added, "It must be true then."

"What must be true?"

"Beautiful things. Sometimes you can just feel the edge of them, like music."

"I wonder if I understand you," Anne said. "I used always to try to give you beautiful things, dearest."

"I know. But nobody else could see them. I thought perhaps it was just you or like a story, and that everything was really different."

Anne still couldn't understand. It was difficult for Lee to explain. She had grown so used to accepting ugliness—or nothing at all. The words came shyly, gropingly. Anne slowly began to comprehend. It was a majority against a minority that had brought about the disbelief. And she began to perceive, too, that there had been a flaw in her own presentation. She limited her artist's vision and looked suddenly upon the world with the eyes of the world.

"Dearest," she said all at once, groping herself for clearness, "I believe I haven't been altogether right any more than Mrs. Darrah and those people were altogether right. I believe I've never explained to you that people have to see with their minds as well as with their eyes before a thing can be complete in beauty."

She had not. It was so easy to take too much for granted where Lee was concerned. Lee did not now quite understand what she meant.

"You see, so few things are wholly beautiful or wholly ugly." Anne felt her way onward. "Mrs. Darrah might go down to the pier here in the morning and see Jim Shannock's old boat pulled in—such a shabby old boat with the paint peeling off and fish-scales stuck slimily all over it—and she'd look at the high, black, long-legged pier and the wet sand, and she'd probably sniff and say, 'Ugh, dead fish!' And if she told you, you'd think it was ugly."

"Yes," said Lee.

"But—*I'd* see the wonderful shining pattern of bright blue that the inlet made between the piles of the pier, and the hot, singing splash of red on the lobster-pot buoys, and the heavenly filmy turquoise of the faded green on Jim's boat, and the whole dim, throbbing blueness of the sea and the sky reaching out and up. There are two ways to see everything, Lee."

Lee considered. "There'd be another way," she said. "If I was there, I'd think most of all of how the water goes around the pier, and that sad, high-up noise the gulls make."

Anne contemplated her picture shorn of everything but those two sounds and then irrelevantly rolled Lee over on the sand and kissed her.

"I think you mean," said Lee, "that you have to understand how to see things just the way you have to understand how to hear things."

Anne sat up excitedly. "Exactly!" she cried. "Dearest, you've explained it better than I could. Mrs. Darrah would wish that the pesky sea-gulls would keep quiet. Do you see?"

Lee began to, at last, and a great tranquillity flowed over her. Mamsy's hand clung close; the fire murmured among its embers. The edge of limitless water beat beyond the dunes; above, the whole of darkness was peopled with patterned constellations whose mystic names wove a spell for Lee's drowsiness.

XVI

The burlap-clad babies and their mother included Lee in certain wild revels among the dunes. The sculptor's wife

wrapped her children in a perpetual atmosphere of untutored interpretative dances. They existed in other creatures' attitudes. "Now we're sea-nymphs—now we're sandpipers—now we're hoptoads!"

Certain wild revels among the dunes.

Anne came upon them in a hollow, Lee gloriously wreathed with trailing kelp, blowing imaginary blasts on a shell and leaping like a naiad, while the children tumbled for all the world like curled-up sea-urchins at her feet, and their mother

piped upon some primitive reed whistle among the beach-pea bushes. Anne stood spellbound and presently the sculptor's wife beckoned her to her side and put down the reed, whereupon the rolling babes uncurled and ran shouting seaward, each with a hand of Lee, down to the smooth, overlapping ripples of the surf's edge.

"It's fun to see the angles disappearing."

"It's thrilling," the sculptor's wife confided. "I've never watched anything so new. It's like seeing a Pan-thing get a soul. You see there are no comparisons. Most people—my babies even, for instance—compare and imitate. You tell them, 'Be a hoptoad,' and they hop; 'Be a cloud,' and they billow and float. But she interprets out of the very bottom of her soul—groping. It's thrilling, and funny sometimes, and mostly touching."

"It *is* thrilling," Anne agreed, "and I'm everlastingly grateful to you."

Anne had no dancing in her. She was too conscious of herself ever to become whole-heartedly a sea-sprite or a wind or even to encourage Lee to be one. She gazed in mingled amusement and admiration at the sculptor's wife, whose straight green garment was raw-edged and whose slim, brown, bare feet were thrust into loose and dilapidated sandals. The three dancers were splashing in the shallows—Lee tall and lithe in her clinging jersey bathing-suit, the shining kelp trailing still from flying hair, the babies tumbling like animated fountain figures, immersing themselves and their convertible garments and arising in showers of flashing bubbles like little mer-things.

"It's fun to see the angles disappearing," said the sculptor's wife. Her babies had no angles; Anne knew of whom she spoke. The sculptor's wife raised her reedy whistle. "She has unsounded depths," she added ambiguously, and blew a shrill and elfin blast which brought her decorative trio gamboling up the beach.

XVII

Late in June an archduke had been assassinated at Sarajevo. By the end of August the beat of the waves had become, for Anne, the tramp of the world's armies marching unbelievably across all Europe. The lonely beaches were far from war, the little colony incredulous. Return to town brought reality closer; the quiet walls of the white house could not shut it out. Lee took to knitting—detestable reminder of Willburg—to good purpose; already the plea for mufflers and socks was beginning to sweep the land.

Tyler Eustis quietly joined the Foreign Legion and departed unobtrusively for France. He did not inform Anne

that he was going; she heard it from Mrs. Ned Stiles. In fact he had seen nothing of Anne since a night more than five years before.

"I suppose he feels he'll be more use there than here," Julia Stiles said. "And of course it would be quite different if he were a married man," she added, a trifle consciously. Anne's neighbors had never ceased to wonder at the sudden and unexplained cessation of what they had been pleased to consider a romance.

But Anne had little time to brood over dead romance, or even over the great and ghastly problems of the world at war, so absorbing and immediate a problem was beneath her own roof. The iron bonds severed, the barriers down, Lee was hers once more, the old devotion rekindled, the old responsibility renewed and redoubled. Lee was hers—and what was she going to do about it?

FOURTH VERSE

Silver and Gold Will Be Stole Away

I

LEE had come back to the white house brown and straight and shining with nearly all the outward manifestations of Willburg gone. In so zealously eradicating them, Anne had perhaps overlooked the years of sound and solid schooling which had somehow brought Lee up through the grades of grammar school, as the world reckoned learning. Just how Anne was to continue that education she was not quite sure. By reading, perhaps. Reading, in Anne's opinion, covered a multitude of subjects. As autumn drew down and the prospect of winter lengthened ahead, it became quite evident that Lee must have something more to fill her time than piano strumming and sock knitting.

"We must work," Anne announced resolutely, clearing, as it were, the decks of the studio for action. "Let's see what you know, now, so that we can map out a definite course."

"Well," Lee considered, tilting her chin and looking earnest and enchanting, "we were parsing Evangeline, and we'd got as far as President Buchanan in history—"

"So I recollect," said Anne.

"—and we were doing Partial Payments and Compound Interest—ugh, horrid—and we were—"

Anne's mind scrambled frantically among long-forgotten

relics of learning and tried to remember what comes after Compound Interest, and wondered how she could teach it if she remembered. It had really hardly occurred to her that Lee could have progressed beyond the "multipicashum tables" of those early lessons in the studio.

"It must all be in a book," she reflected privately. "If I know the answers it'll be easy enough." Aloud she said, "Well, you're very learned, old dear. We'll cut out the United States History and finish it later. I know we're a great and glorious land, but why must we always *begin* with ourselves, instead of going back and finding out how we happened. We'll—eh—go on with mathematics, and I'll read everything that's nice to you."

Before they could "go on" with mathematics, Anne had to send away for the mysterious metal symbols which Lee's fingers seemed to consider perfect substitutes for visual numerals. Anne viewed the little leaden lozenges in their criss-cross wooden compartments with confessed ignorance, and called Lee's nimble manipulation of them "sorting pi."

While they waited for this outfit to arrive they began their historical researches, and, abandoning President Buchanan, they turned back to a time when the portal temples of the Gizeh pyramids were mirrored in the Nile and young Nineveh reared her brazen walls. Anne shaped the Sphinx from clay and cut a stiff-winged Assyrian bull in bas-relief, and overlaid bare history with Petrie and Layard till they were in danger of never progressing at all in their leisurely journey down the ages toward President Buchanan. It was great fun! Mamsy certainly had a way of describing things that was not like anybody else in the world.

There was nothing to describe about the mathematics. Anne found that the answers in the back of the book really

didn't help a bit unless one at least had some idea of how to set about reaching them.

" 'A merchant,' " she declaimed, paint-brush in hand, book propped beside the easel, " 'offered his goods for sale at 8 per cent below cost' (worthy man! No profiteering, mind you!)—er—'8 per cent below cost, but afterward sold them for $6,992.47 which is 5 per cent less than his first offer. How much did he lose?' He must have lost heart to see how his business was going!"

"Well, if you multiplied the cost by the loss per cent—but you don't know the cost." Lee was meditative. "Oh, *I*

She cast a furtive eye at the back of the book.

see!" Her fingers flew, popping phalanxes of leaden symbols into their pigeonholes.

Anne didn't see at all. She cast a furtive eye at the back of the book and prayed that Lee's answer would be right.

How silly, now, to let one's brain grow so befogged! The mathematical groove in Anne's mind, never very deep, had certainly rusted solid!

Hand in hand with these academic pursuits went a training less scholarly, but no less important, a training that kept to no definite hours, but was scattered broadcast day-long, and concerned itself with the little obvious usages of living that are imitative habit with most people. Lee had gone to Willburg with the instinctive spontaneity of childhood marred by none of the curious mannerisms which affect many blind children. She had been neither self-conscious nor timid, and she had become both. In empty corridors and bare schoolrooms she had no opportunity to acquire ease of posture and dexterity of deportment. With the stout and non-upsetting crockery of Willburg's sufficient but sparsely furnished table, she had no incentive to practice the graces of tea-time.

The sculptor's wife had given her freedom of movement among the dunes and Anne now tried to apply that freedom to practical uses. Lee learned to sit down confidently without groping along the boundaries of a chair; to enter a room gracefully and unhesitatingly; to strike the happy medium between primness and too great informality; to laugh her own gay laughter, nor think it necessary to stifle it with a masking hand. Anne pocketed Lee's pride for her, and they made one great continuous game of it.

"What do you do with your hands when you're just standing around?"

"Does it look funny if I kick the chair leg to see where it is?"

"Is this how to be very much surprised at something?"

Lee's questions flew on. There were all sorts. Her faith reëstablished and her imagination reawakened, interest in countless things flamed up anew. Anne found her task huge and comprehensive. Even the arithmetic seemed at times simple beside so much of knowledge and experience to be expounded single-handed. Everything!

"Does *looking* at water make you feel the way putting your hand in it does?"

"How do you scowl, anyway, Mamsy; like this?"

"What *is* red, really?"

"How high does the sky look?"

Until Anne was sometimes almost glad to seek refuge in the more circumscribed information of the text-books.

II

The trouble with school at home is its desultory habit. Real school strides, triumphant, past the pitfalls of Indian summer days, the snares of November's beckoning blue and gold. Anne was always tempted and frequently fell. With sandwiches in their pockets and sticks in their fists they would hike over Steeplejack Hill, Anne embroidering the darkness for Lee with a living description of all that was unwound along the mellow road. And though their talk was sometimes of the Medes and Persians and the golden triremes that put forth from Tyre, it was never of Bank Discount and Ratio! To salve their consciences they often spoke a sort of French, but the range of Lee's ideas was so much wider than her idiom, that the half English jargon she lapsed into would not have been countenanced in any schoolroom.

"Nous sommes méchantes," Anne declared, but assuring herself that this weather wouldn't last forever, and that it was a sin to lose it.

In step and singing *The Marseillaise.*

"J'aime being méchante," said Lee. "Isn't it presque temps pour les sandweeshes?"

Steeplejack Hill was, for Anne, a joy unfailing. The shapes of its night-dark cedars blowing against the sky were wholly satisfying, the patterned perspective of countryside below was never twice woven with the same colors. On the clearest of days one might, with lengthened gaze, mark along the skyline a blue-bright thread that meant the sea. Lee, still mindful of the teachings of the sculptor's wife whenever she felt wide spaces about her, was inclined to caper upon the hilltop, and if Steeplejack had lacked anything, Anne felt it completed by Lee's tiptoe figure in russet coat and scarlet tam-o'-shanter, poised on the highest rock.

They walked home with the wind behind them, in step and singing *The Marseillaise.* Anne thought of how many straight, tree-bordered roads in France were shaking to that splendid, terrible music now; Lee was mindful of nothing but the surging rhythm that swept her along and the marching wind in the tree-tops.

How warm and still the white house seemed when the door clicked behind them! The kitchen smelled of marjoram and nutmeg. The "woman-by-the-day" always left them in sweet possession at five o'clock, and Lee loved to set the supper table with the heavy Canton plates. There was a picture on each plate, a blue picture whose story Lee had heard many a time when she was a very small person and retold since her return to the white house. She always liked to think of it, elaborating it now with new detail. Anne found her with some forks in one hand, apparently present in the flesh only.

"Poor things!" she remarked inconsequently; "was the father frightfully angry?"

"What on earth are you talking about?" Anne inquired, depositing a casserole on a faïence tile.

"The Willow Pattern people."

"Oh! Yes, he was frightfully angry. He came out with lanterns to look for them and he stamped his foot each step he took."

"Is this where he is?"

"No, that's the doves. He's down in the right-hand corner. (What satisfaction can it give the child!)" Anne wondered inwardly. "Sit down and let's partake. Steeplejack has made me ravenous."

Lee sat down and sprang up again at once.

"I forgot the candles!"

"Oh, never mind, now."

"But isn't it dark for you, Mamsy?"

Anne never could get used to questions like that.

"No, the light's turned on, honey."

"Oh, well, I like the candles. I won't be a minute."

She fetched them from the mantel and tossed the matchbox rather neatly to Anne.

"Why do you like the candles, *mon chou?*" said Anne, lighting them.

"Oh, because you do so much, I guess."

"I'm afraid," Anne said, plunging a spoon into the casserole, "that you do that entirely too much—like things just because I do or because I say so. How do you know I'm right?"

"You always are. I like them, anyway. And I remembered them, at Willburg, even, because they were part of the white house and your things—nice."

Well, that was just what Anne wanted to get at. The candles had no intrinsic merit, cold metal at one end and hot flame at the other. Only as an accessory to a pleasant whole had they any meaning. Mamsy loved candlelight and Lee loved Mamsy, ergo: Lee loved candlelight. Anne laughed.

"You know," she said, "I do like you at times. Have a baked egg?"

III

The mathematics really got the better of Anne finally. When she realized that time would bring only more terrors, and that before long she would totter on the verge of an algebraic abyss, she put her case before the teacher of

mathematics at the Vernon High School, whom she encountered at the school's Christmas play.

"My pupil knows more than I do," she confessed. "It's humiliating and unsafe. I thought I could depend on the answers at the back, but I perceive there's more to the game than that."

So Miss Dawes laughed and listened to Anne's plea and came to coach Lee three afternoons a week. They usually had tea afterward, and it was a rather pleasant sort of school —certainly for Miss Dawes. Anne enjoyed it also; she had been finding her own work quite as much interrupted as in the early days of Lee's life at the white house. Miss Dawes did not seem to consider Anne a despicable object because her mind shut up tight at the sight of a problem.

"You can't expect to do *everything,*" she said, looking with a certain wistful admiration at the leaning canvases about the studio.

"Ah," said Anne, getting out teacups, "doubtless it's a sign of genius. I've heard that Beethoven had to write two and two and two and two and two on a window shutter and add them up on his fingers to find out what five times two was!"

As for the rest of the white house school, Anne continued to attend to the history, and they read with edification of the grasping tendencies of the early German tribes, comparing their facts with the daily headlines that bespoke an undiminished lust for conquest in the successors. Lee also wrote many compositions in straggling Braille, at first filled with fanciful stolen imagery, later dealing more truly with her own feelings and reactions in a world of specialized sensations.

"Braille's so slow," she complained. "Sometimes I just

want to stick words on the air, fast. It might be poetry if it would rime. Or perhaps it's a tune; I'm not sure if they'd be words or notes."

At such times Anne wondered what it was that fluttered there on the edge of expression; something truly winged? Or was it just a very normal, eager spirit, beating against bonds that it could never wholly realize?

All this was very well; but if Anne's canvas happened to be in a condition where it could not be left, or if Lee happened to be inspired to make up new chords on the piano instead of reciting, the schedule was knocked to bits. Of course it became easier and easier to twist it, until it couldn't very well have been recognized as a schedule at all. It was Miss Dawes who said:

"Why don't you put her into high school?"

"Would high school stand for it, even supposing she could get in?" Anne wanted to know.

Miss Dawes was positive. "She's a revelation to me. I had no idea a sightless person could respond as she does. I'm afraid I was quite as ignorant about it all as—you are about ratio and proportion! I'm very sure she could do it, and it would be a stimulus to every one of us."

"I didn't know 'stimulus' was a synonym for 'nuisance,' " Anne said. "I think you're a truly nice person."

So she consulted the principal. He was a liberal and enlightened gentleman and—perhaps reassured by Miss Dawes—he heard Anne's proposals. His teachers generously agreed to them, and, after a summer of intensive coaching, Lee entered the Vernon High School in the autumn as a regular pupil.

"It will be the hardest work you've ever done," the principal told Lee in his office that first morning. "We'll all

have to work; you, and our teachers, and Miss Ramsey, but mostly you."

It was hard work, but Lee responded to it amazingly. Anne had of late been setting her down as lazy. Now she was forced to the conclusion that the school and not the scholar had been at fault. The competition of a whole class in which no allowance was made for her seemed to set alight a flame of pride and ambition. She had to exert every ounce of mental energy. At Willburg she had been always rather the cleverest person in her class. Among equally handicapped children she outdistanced them. At the white house she had been the only pupil, with everything her own way. Now for the first time she faced real labor and she met it defiantly.

The principal was right when he said that Anne too would have to work. Whenever Braille text-books could be had she secured them, but for the most part she read aloud, interminably, the lessons which Lee had to prepare, sometimes over and over, till the point was clear and the strained perplexity gone from Lee's listening face. But the mornings in the studio were long and free—until the walk through the crisping air to the staid brick walls of Vernon High. And because of that bit of solitude, when the responsibility was momentarily shifted, the sight of Lee's expectant face turned waiting for her was doubly dear, the content of the afternoons together twice as satisfying.

The classes were strenuous for Lee. She took notes feverishly in Braille, and depended on the interpretation of a devoted seat-mate for blackboard work. The white house acquired a second-hand typewriter and Lee learned to pound out themes for herself, the typographical errors in which a

kindly English teacher discounted. But Lee passed her mid-year examinations and Angela Morton flunked them.

It wasn't all work. Mamsy read tales of old delight before a fire that hummed and rustled and made Lee remember that night of stars on the beach when she had rediscovered beauty. Sometimes they both lay on the hearth-rug and roasted things to eat, which were charred on the outside and raw in the middle, and delicious because of their very oddity. Anne had a way of unearthing delightful ballads and they sang them together, Lee snatching for better chords on the piano over Mamsy's shoulder. Music—that was another thing! Lee's voice was settling to something that would be a golden contralto with training. Anne dared not add the work of singing lessons to the already too heavy burden of school; and training—real training—cost so cruelly. Anne remembered the splendid choiring of young voices that morning in chapel at Willburg, the firm, eager face of Mr. Lamson as he tapped time with his baton on the music-desk. Lee would have been given music there; lots of it. Did Willburg really know best after all? Anne executed a hasty mental about-face from her thoughts. Music was not everything; Willburg ignored too much else.

"Think out loud, Mamsy," Lee requested. "Everything gets terribly still when you think so hard to yourself."

IV

Girls in their teens have a tendency to idolize any one around whom they can weave the smallest amount of mystery or romance. Certain girls at the Vernon High School idolized Lee, which wasn't particularly good for her. They

squabbled for the privilege of conducting her from one classroom to another, despite the fact that after the first fortnight she was quite capable of faring all over the building alone. They presented her with strange and unwholesome goodies at lunchtime and offered her every service from tying her shoestrings to doing her hair a new way. Often they stopped by for her in the morning, and Anne viewed

"Oh, you're so wonderful, Lee!"

with some surprise the complacency with which Lee allowed herself to be almost borne off bodily by these admirers.

"I do hate being pawed," Lee admitted, "but some of them are such bricks about reading blackboard work to me and that sort of thing that I hate to tell them not to—if it amuses them to paw."

"Oh, you're so *won*derful, Lee!" A worshiper by the name of Clare stated it very often. *"Isn't* she just wonder-

ful, girls? I just can't grasp how you can read that stuff, Lee."

Lee kept her place in the tremendous tome that represented *The Merchant of Venice* and replied:

"Fiddle-dee-dee; I don't see why it's any more wonderful than reading black squiggles a yard away with your eyes."

"Oh, but that's *different!*" a chorus protested. *"Anybody can read!"*

"Nonsense," said Lee, conscious that she couldn't make her point clear to them. Then, pleasantly aware of the admiration she would arouse, she cleared her throat, flung back her head, and declaimed the lines beneath her flying fingers.

> "The quality of mercy is not strained;
> It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
> Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;
> It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
> 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
> The throned monarch better than his crown . . ."

"Doesn't she do it *wonderfully?*"

"Can't you just *see* Portia?"

"Oh, Lee, you ought to go on the *stage!*"

So babbled the devoted minions—and would Lee have been human if she had not plumed herself a little? She did plume herself, until, before the fire that evening she went over the morrow's lesson, heard Anne thunder:

> ". . . Nay, if the scales do turn
> But in the estimation of a hair,
> Thou diest and all thy goods are confiscate!"

and felt how far short of elder interpretation her own performance came.

Wonderful as Lee's schoolmates thought her, their attempts to include her in school festivities seemed to fall rather flat. Basket ball was confessedly a bore: thumps, whistles, and shouts; one might as well stay at home and be told next day that Vernon had or hadn't won. At the few school hops which Lee attended all the boys were apparently afraid to ask her for a dance. Clare or Edna circled apologetically with her, plainly eager to return to a masculine partner. The director of the annual plays—in which she might really have shone—never dreamed of including Lee in the cast, and she sat in the third row with Mamsy listening to Edna mangling the part in which Lee had coached her.

Evenings at the white house were pleasanter than at other people's houses, and when Anne sometimes voiced a fear that she was quiet and ancient company, Lee kissed her reproachfully with a love and gratitude that she could neither fully realize nor express.

Clare and Edna and Louise sometimes came in the evening and sat on the floor in front of the fire and giggled before and after each inconsequent remark. Lee giggled too, quite convincingly, and when Clare banged out "K-K-K-Katy" on the piano, Lee joined in with gusto and made the song really funny for the first time to Anne.

"I dare say she ought to have much more of this," Anne reflected. "Isn't giggling supposed to be the birthright of young things? She takes to it so easily; I wonder if she's starved for it."

But the fact was that Lee took to anything easily and skimmed the fun off the top of everything that came her way. Perhaps it was because of the very solidity of the foundation that she could flit off perilously, sure of a firm footing secure below her. For after the excitable chums had

gone, Lee's flippant mood would seem to have gone out the door with them. She would swing back on the piano-stool and sing, perhaps:

> "Oh, can ye sew cushions, and can ye sew sheets,
> And can ye sing balaloo when the bairnie greets?"

with such tender contentment in her crooning that Anne could not help but feel a drowsy reassurance flow over her. Lee was all hers, really—a shining to fill the white house. Anne was still jealous and still unaware of the fact.

Angela Morton was loyal to her childhood friendship for Lee in a patronizing sort of way. At sixteen she was an overgrown, buxom girl, with fluffy fair hair bobbed in the fashion set by a popular dancer. She always asked Lee to her parties, of which there were many; for although the war still dragged its interminable horrors across elder consciousness, Angela's very young set danced their way through the tense months of 1918. Sometimes Lee went to the parties and sometimes she didn't. Angela asked her because she amused "the bunch," for Lee could strum the piano or the ukulele impartially and sing modern ditties with an air of solemnity which the young merrymakers thought excruciatingly funny. Anne, watching these impromptu performances from the side-lines, with Julia Stiles and other parents, wondered if the solemnity was put on, or if Lee really enjoyed the syncopated strains. She certainly never lifted up her voice to sing them at home, but went about caroling madrigals of Purcell and Heywood. Anne did not countenance many parties. Lee had to work harder at school than the others; that was the usual excuse to Mrs. Morton.

One evening Lee was out, under the wing of Mrs. Ned

Stiles. Young Ned played taxi with a ubiquitous Ford sedan; Anne heard its door slam outside the white house and young voices shrilling good-night. Lee came in, fresh with the cold, pulling off her tan coat.

"Good time?" Anne asked, stirring the fire.

"Oh, pretty good," Lee agreed. "It's nice and quiet here,

Angela asked her because she amused "the bunch."

though." She sat down on the floor, her coat half off, and held out her hands to the embers.

"Too quiet?"

Lee shook her head and emitted a negative "unh-um."

"What's the matter, Mamsy?" she demanded suddenly, turning about and leveling at Anne an uncannily searching look. Startled, Anne let fall her newspaper.

"Nothing, dearest. Well—the war, I suppose."

Lee looked properly grave; one-step music still hummed in her head.

"You don't remember Mr. Eustis, do you? No, you wouldn't; it was before you went away to Willburg. I knew him. He's been killed at Arras."

"Oh, Mamsy—how terrible! Somebody you really knew! Was he nice?"

"Yes," Anne said, "he was very nice. He was very conscientious."

Lee ran her hand back and forth on the smooth, warm rail of the fender.

"I don't know—it's sort of horrid, isn't it, for us just to be dancing and having fun when people are being killed."

"Sort of," Anne agreed.

"I suppose everybody needs cheering up, though," Lee defended. "It would be awful if we did *nothing* but fold compresses." Anne and Lee spent two afternoons a week in the midst of a busy, coifed group at the local Red Cross.

Lee fell silent. Somehow this brought it very near. Some one Mamsy knew; some one who had seen Lee herself when she was little—some one who had been in this house—lying dead in France. Even the compress folding hadn't particularly depressed Lee; she thought of how many she could do in an hour, and listened to the gossip of the busy women. She never considered the purpose to which all these soft, accurately folded squares were to be put.

"You see," Anne broke the silence, "you were just a child

when this thing began. You're thoroughly used to the war. Some of us who are older can't get used to it."

"That's awful," Lee said softly, "to get used to things that are wrong."

"That's awful,—to get used to things that are wrong."

Anne wondered if she knew how strangely true a thing she had said.

"Come to bed, honey," she advised. "It's mean of me to have spoiled your party."

"The party was rottenly stupid," said Lee, coming to Anne's outstretched arm and linking her own through it.

Anne slept little. For with the tangled tyranny of thoughts at night, Tyler Eustis stood perpetually before her with her unkindness bruised upon his dead forehead.

V

Lee finished high school, if not with heaping honors, certainly with no discredit. Anne had augmented the courses in summer with unlimited good reading, which Lee was always to remember against a background of warm wind and the stirring fragrance of the garden where they read.

"What now?" Anne asked both herself and Lee at frequent intervals after the graduation. (She had quietly suppressed the local newspaper's accounts of "Wonderful Achievements of Blind Girl! Miss Lee Kelton, 18, Wins Learning in Spite of Overwhelming Handicap! Sightless Student Triumphs over Scores of Seeing Fellows!")

"What now?"

"College," said Lee promptly.

"Where's the money coming from?"

"I could work my way through."

"I wish I could agree with you, dearest," Anne said. "Why do you want to go to college, anyway?"

"Everybody goes," Lee replied reasonably. "Angela is trying for Bryn Mawr this fall."

"I imagine Angela won't get beyond trying," Anne observed pessimistically. "What would you do if you were foot-free and could pick and choose?"

"Go abroad and study music, I guess," Lee declared after some thought, perhaps remembering tales of European opportunities before the war.

"H'm," said Anne.

"If I could give her music, real music—oh, if I could!" Anne brooded constantly. She painted doggedly to win the gold that might set free the gold of Lee's voice, and

did not succeed any too well. But she formulated a plan which she finally put before Lee somewhat reluctantly; it seemed so shabby a compromise with which to meet dreams of Paris.

"What if we shut up shop and went to New York this winter? I might get some new ideas, browsing around the galleries, and you could study singing. They have some wonderfully good courses, I've found, at the Organization for the Blind. They're practically free; oh, if we didn't have to consider the beastly lucre! And probably their methods would be easier for you than some temperamental maestro's who was used to teaching sighted folk."

To Anne's relief, Lee was enchanted. She went into elaborate imaginings, happily oblivious of Anne's pangs in shutting up the studio, and unaware, as usual, of any sacrifice that was being made for her.

It was thrilling to be actually living in the greatest city in the world! Lee found amusing the two tiny furnished rooms that so fettered Anne. Breakfasts cooked from the contents of paper bags over a gas-plate and dinners eaten each night in a different restaurant filled her with a sense of Bohemian adventure. She was sure that Mamsy had provided an excellent substitute for the Latin Quarter.

The vocal course at the Organization proved to be not quite so wonderfully good as Anne had heard. It was conducted by an earnest blind lady who was possessed of more patience than ability—but patience was an essential quality in dealing with Lee, and she laid a structural foundation of which Anne was unfortunately ignorant. Mr. Lamson, at Willburg, had shaped an excellent beginning; Miss Rollins now built upon it with quiet enthusiasm. Anne, who met her from time to time, judged her—as was

too usual with Anne—from a single point of view, and set her down once and for all as a sad product of too much institutional training.

Anne spent her time principally in acting as guide and chaperon. It seemed to her that she passed her life sitting on a hard bench in the dim lobby of the Organization waiting for Lee to finish a music lesson. But lessons every

The work was difficult and tiring.

other day, and concerts when they could afford them, did not fill Lee's time. The resources of the white house were not to be found in the furnished rooms; Lee realized the pleasure of possession in a way she never had before. Anne would have spent much time at the Museum and in the galleries, but could not bring herself to drag Lee often on what would be for her such meaningless expeditions. It was Lee herself who made a suggestion.

"Why don't I jump into some of this manual work they're

all buzzing about at the Organization? It might make another string to my bow, mightn't it?"

Anne reluctantly agreed that it might. She had, through thick and thin, steadfastly insisted that Lee should never "make mops." She broadly included as "mops" the lovely bags and silken weavings that the skillful workers fashioned in the training shops of the Organization.

"I feel so stupid," Lee urged, "twiddling my thumbs. I don't suppose I should like it, but then it's awfully good for you to do things you don't like," she added virtuously.

She didn't like it. The actual work was difficult and tiring, the stupid, wrangling gossip of many of the other girls and women infinitely wearing. She was too proud to confess to Anne that the thing she liked least of all was sudden inclusion in what the world considered a defective class. Anne questioned her anxiously.

"Is it being worth while? Is it working out?"

"It's grand," Lee laughed. "I'll warrant *you* couldn't make an elegant shiny table runner all over ichthyosauruses rampant!"

Anne agreed that she couldn't. Neither could Lee, for that matter. Anne's days were free now till the late afternoon hour when she stopped for Lee at the Organization. She wandered aimlessly, sketched half-heartedly in the Park, shook her head sadly over the modernist exhibitions in the galleries, and then, renewing her student days, got a copyist's ticket at the Museum and pretended she wanted to study design and ornament. She did so quite as successfully as Lee pretended she liked to weave.

The loom next to Lee was operated by a pale, calm-faced woman whose movements were as automatic as the lift and throw of the treadle. She joined only occasionally in the

interchange of complaints around her. Her expression seemed at first sight utterly dull, till you might catch just the faint tremor of a smile of great beauty which seemed to stir the spirit within more than to move the set facial muscles. She never smiled at what was said, but sometimes to herself as though at a hidden beam of radiance. Lee knew nothing of her but the thud and shift of her loom and her occasional replies to the overseer, until one lunch hour when all but she and Lee had gone to consume sandwiches around a battered piano which some one was torturing into explosions of jazz.

"I don't believe I caught your name," the older girl said, "when you came, Miss—"

"Kelton," Lee put in. "Nor I yours."

"I'm Vonya Povak," the other told her. "I hope you like your work with us, Miss Kelton. It's real tiring at first, though."

Lee wondered if she should be able to stick at it long enough to be anything but tired by it.

"It is, rather," she agreed.

"I guess you aren't used to it; I mean any work, like us. You haven't lost your sight very long, have you, excuse me?"

"I've never seen," Lee said.

"My!" said Miss Povak softly. After a pause she added, "You know, when you first came here I'd have sworn you was sighted."

Lee laughed. "I have a very dear friend," she said, "who has lent me her eyes ever since I was a baby."

"Oh, my!" The young woman moved a little closer. "If all of us could do that! I guess—I guess if we haven't got our sight, friends are next best."

It was rather a new idea to Lee that devoted friends did not grow on every bush by the wayside. She pondered it. Miss Povak spoke again.

"But we don't all get a chance. I guess you got one. I was in institutions—all kinds—right along, and that's real different. I begun when I was a baby at the Wells Memorial."

Lee started incredulously. "But *I* was at the Wells Memorial!" she declared, rather as if she had been its sole inmate.

"You *was?* For pity's sakes! When? How old are you?"

"Let's see," Lee considered, "I was there from 1904 till 1908, off and on."

"My gracious—so was I! Well, I went to state school in 1906. What's your first name?"

"Lee."

Vonya pressed her hands over her unseeing eyes and thought back and back and back till she stood wistfully fingering the square, varnished leg of a high-chair, listening and listening for a small imperious voice which, when it spoke, might in all likelihood say, "Go 'way now, ba' girl."

"I remember you," she said at last. "You was a dear baby."

Her hand groped suddenly, tremulously, for Lee's; her smile made radiant her gentle, resigned face beneath her banded fair hair.

"We ought to feel like old chums," she said.

Lee took the hand and held it silently. She felt like a coward and a traitor that she could not welcome Vonya's friendship. More and more she knew herself to be undeniably of the little fellowship of the blind; less and less

could she bear to bring to it the complete allegiance she knew she owed. All afternoon the loom beat wretchedly across her thoughts.

"Am I sailing under false colors?" she demanded again and again of herself.

She said nothing to Anne of the recognition of Vonya, though Anne would have remembered with quick sympathy the fair, shy child who had sat upon her lap one day long ago, and above whose head she had met for the first time the compelling summons of Lee's gaze. Instead, Lee plied Anne with urgent demands.

"What have you been doing? Tell me about the pictures, the cubist show, anything! Anything that's real and big and—outside!"

"The cubist show certainly is neither real nor big," Anne said. "Why this sudden frenzy, most dear?"

And then Lee, later, after further thought on the matter of friendship and sacrifice, became contrite.

"You'll go daft," she said, "dancing attendance on my miserable activities. Please—why don't you go home and unlock the white house and do your own things?"

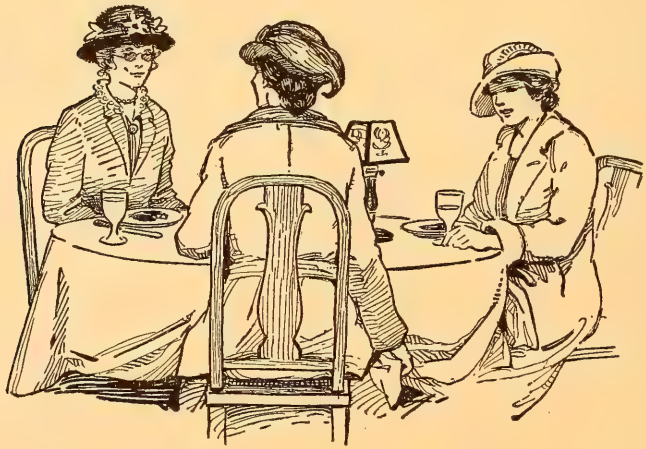
"Leave you on a park bench, I suppose?"

"No, there's some sort of boarding-house where a lot of the girls live. It's run by the Organization, I think. I dare say it's cheap, and I could just buckle down to work."

Anne shook her head, and then voiced an audible negative.

"Nay, nay. I should hate it, even if you didn't. Besides, I want to see you in this operetta you're giving up there, or whatever it is. Then perhaps Miss Rollins would give you some stuff to practice, and we could run home for a while and pretend we're human beings."

Lee reconsidered in the matter of Vonya, a week later, and related the tale to Anne, who promptly said that Vonya must dine with them. It was plainly the chief event of Miss Povak's life. She waited with Lee for Anne in the lobby, a hundred times adjusting the brim of her blue plush hat, a hundred times transferring her white cotton gloves and her crumpled handkerchief from one hand to the other. Anne arrived, took an arm of each girl, and marched them off to a jolly little French eating-place near by. Vonya was palpitantly happy and very ill at ease. She was being allowed to participate in Real Life, and she



Vonya was palpitantly happy and very ill at ease.

made the most of a unique occurrence. Of course reminiscences were unavoidable.

"You don't remember, I suppose, how you sat on my lap and Miss Burke asked you to sing for me?"

"No, I don't, Miss Ramsey," Vonya confessed, very self-consciously wielding her fork. "Did I sing?"

"You didn't."

"I was an awful shy little kid," Vonya apologized. "Terribly shy."

"Much shyer than *this* young piece," Anne commented, "who at once sang loudly without being asked."

Lee laughed goldenly, and Vonya smothered her giggles awkwardly in her napkin. Anne covertly buttered Vonya's bread for her, cast a glance at Lee who was neatly pouring herself a glass of water, and sighed a little.

They escorted Vonya back to the Organization boarding-house, where a group of the workers sat vigorously rocking in a half-lighted room, and then Lee and Anne struck out to walk to their lodgings across the Park.

"It's awful to see anybody so grateful," Lee said. "I mean, it makes *me* feel ungrateful."

"Pish," said Anne irrelevantly. "We must romp her off on some sort of spree one Sunday."

"Do you suppose she would have been any different if she'd had a different sort of a chance?" Lee mused. "I doubt it."

"Well, you everlastingly self-satisfied little piece of work!" Anne exclaimed vehemently. At that moment she longed to add, "And do you flatter yourself you'd have been just the same as you are if you *hadn't* had a different chance? You most certainly wouldn't!"

Instead, she said: "I want you to be awfully nice to Vonya, Lee. Not condescending either—nice."

Once upon a time Miss Burke had said, "Play with Vonya, Lee," to which Lee had replied by kicking, not only Vonya, but the matron with her very small boots.

VI

The last rehearsal of the operetta which the girls of the music school were to give had come to an end, and Anne gathered in a very weary performer after it. Anne had refused to come to any of the rehearsals, saying she wanted the full glory of the finished production to burst upon her unspoiled by any of its earlier agonies. The enthusiastic young college woman who was devotedly coaching the actors came out arm in arm with Miss Rollins, who was directing the singing.

"That Lee of yours is a wiz, Miss Ramsey," said the young coach vehemently. "She's put pep into all of us; we just can't fall short of her standards. Hullo, here you are, Your Highness!" as Lee came out jamming on her hat over a rather pale face.

"Is my Miss Ramsey here?" she asked, and grew suddenly radiant when Anne slid a hand through her arm and said, "She is."

"It's a lark," she told Anne on the way home, "but mercy, it's exhausting! For everybody! I should think poor Miss Whitney would be worn to a thread coaching. Not only coaching; you know she's stage carpenter and everything else. To-night about a ton of imitation leaves and stuff all fell off the wings, and the back drop split up the middle with loud rending when Bertha Essen walked right into it."

"Hard luck! Is the scenery working out all right?"

"So we hear. Miss Whitney says it's a veritable bower of beauty, but I'll reserve judgment till I hear from you tomorrow night. Of course my own opinion is rather biased by encountering all the thumb-tacks and safety-

pins and string and paper and such that aren't supposed to meet the casual eye out front, I fancy."

Anne laughed. "Do the girls like it?"

"Oh, they think it's great sport. At first they weren't much interested in the costumes, but now they're thrilled, and some of them are working up some truly impassioned acting. Miss Whitney has toiled over Vera Lensen till she can really walk offstage first shot, now, and most of the others are quite nimble."

"I suppose you're nimble?"

"Oh, I bat around. I don't have much chance. I have to be more or less majestic."

"I'll guarantee you bat around!" Anne agreed, and added, "Well, I'm most keen to see and hear it all. I think the Organization deserves no end of credit for the show."

"The Organization is quite a wonder," said Lee. "Apparently there's simply no end to the activities it runs for everybody from babies to ancients. Goodness knows, it ought to shake up people like Vonya."

"Is Vonya in the show?"

"Oh, no; I wish she were. She doesn't sing. She'd adore it, I believe. She's coming to it, though; will you look her up?"

"I'll sit with her if I can manage it," Anne said.

"She'd be thrilled to tears," Lee declared.

The operetta was a slight little fantasy with some clever lines and graceful airs. The program, printed by the Organization's own press, another of its excellent activities, stated that the part of Prince Charmion di Bizarro was to be taken by Miss Lee Kelton, and Anne experienced the

pleasurable sensations of seeing her child's name in print as an artist for the first time. She had found Vonya, in a rumpled yellow voile dress, sitting moveless in the fourth row, and had taken the seat beside her. Vonya lighted with pleasure and held Anne's hand tightly throughout the performance.

Though Anne had made most of Lee's costume, she had not seen it in its entirety, and she was unprepared for the effect that lights and make-up would add to it. A group of slightly uncertain retainers singing "Hail, hail, hail!" made way on the verdure-clad platform for the entrance of their prince, who was suddenly swaggering to the very footlights amid a burst of applause alike from loyal fellow-workers in the audience and evening-coated patrons of the Organization who had bought tickets in blocks.

She was a thing of silken shimmer and jeweled glitter; Anne smiled at thought of the ten-cent store gems, the paper muslin generously decorated with radiator paint—what miracles footlights wrought! Her glinting hair was tucked crisply beneath the cap with its gay feather; half a blue velvet portière swept round her shoulder as a cloak; Anne's Florentine silver chain glittered across her emerald and amber doublet. The added splash of color on her cheeks, the dusky hint of burnt cork on her upper lip—she might have flashed out from the pages of a fairy tale! Anne lost her heart to this youth completely and at once, and longed to shout with the chorus:

"Prince Charmion di Bizarro—Huzza!"

The opening aria of the dowager queen, which revealed her plans for the marriage of her handsome son, was somewhat interrupted by the arrival of a very grand lady patroness and her party. Mrs. E. Stacey Plympton had

never been anything but ten minutes late to a theatrical performance in many years of theater-going. She rustled into the seat behind Anne, cracklingly distributed pro-

"Prince Charmion di Bizarro—Huzza!"

grams to her companions, and with sundry loud breathings settled to a scrutiny of the stage through a small lorgnon.

Prince Charmion prepared to dispute his royal mother's statements. He strode with lithe abandon up-stage, flung wide his arms, fixed his agate-gray eyes upon a hazy delineation painted on the patched back-drop, and began to sing in a captivating contralto:

> "As I passed o'er yon mountain-side
> When the day was winged with dew . . ."

It was an old and simple tale—the queen mother planning to marry him off to the ugly princess of the next kingdom without reckoning on the bewitching young lass

who had enslaved Charmion as she mowed her father's meadow.

In the middle of the old nurse's ditty, Mrs. Plympton consulted her program and announced to her party that "this child playing the prince is not blind, you know." When she had confirmed her statement for the third time, Anne—despite a certain pride—felt compelled for the credit of the Organization to turn around and say, "She is. Totally."

Mrs. Plympton turned the lorgnon momentarily upon Anne and Vonya and said:

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite," said Anne.

"Marvelous!" Mrs. Plympton remarked. "Dear, dear creatures! Pauline, just watch that child. Exquisite voice, exquisite!"

"Isn't she just wonderful?" Vonya whispered, holding Anne's hand very tight.

For the Prince had at that moment tossed off a goblet of ethereal wine and cast the cup down with a magnificent gesture as he burst into song. He snapped his fingers, he defied them all, and indeed a sorry picture they presented in comparison to his swaggering Highness. There was some very gingerly sword-play, a grand chorus, and at last the final scene, when Charmion wooed his rustic affinity by very blue gelatine moonlight only to find that she was the poor but noble daughter of an ancient and kingly race after all.

"Oh, sweeter than the loveliest nightingale,
Thy voice, thy step, upon my yearning ear;
Oh, fairer than the hills of Paradise
Thy beauty to mine eyes, my love, my dear!"

The young scamp! Anne's tears blurred the moonlight! The melting voice, the boyish grace in every pleading gesture, the pathos that would storm even Anne's long-schooled heart! The little pastoral princess, a touching small figure in filmy cheesecloth, sank at last into his green silken embrace—only Anne and the breathless coach saw Charmion make a quick side step and stop her from walking into the footlights. Then, with her head stiffly on his shoulder, he turned his rapt face to the full glare of the blue electric bulbs and poured forth his heart.

> "Now runs my cup of joy so brimming o'er,
> Thankless were I to ask one blessing more!"

As the curtains swung jerkily together, the audience burst into unfeigned and long-continued applause, and there were calls until the outraged curtains stuck in protest. Mrs. Plympton moved like a galleon through the press in the aisle.

"Where is that child—that girl who played the prince? I must see her. Where is the child?"

The child was unintentionally rubbing off a good deal of rouge on Mamsy's shoulder as they laughed in each other's arms just inside the wings.

"You heart-breaker! You young rogue!" Anne chided. "You must stay in those clothes forever. My cup of joy will be but half full unless I can have Prince Charmion always!"

"My love, my dear!" hummed Lee, fondling her dagger. "Horrors, who's that demanding me out there?"

Mrs. Plympton's requests for the child who played the prince were to be heard just outside the curtain.

"A bunch of flowers, I dare say," Anne suggested. "You'd better go. Look out for the wing, there."

Anne put Vonya in charge of some of her friends and followed Lee out. She found her twisting the Florentine chain and being talked at by an imposing lady who was more or less overcome by well-bred excitement and emotion.

"Ah, *you* sat in front of us. Perhaps you can tell us about this child. She's too modest."

The lorgnon was directed at Anne. "Did you ever hear such a lovely voice? What's being done about it? What are you doing here, child, studying?"

"Studying music, somewhat," Lee said. "Weaving, somewhat."

"Weaving? Weaving what? Spells? Oh, I know this musical instruction here; I help maintain it, in fact. Tuppenny-ha'penny, tuppeny-ha'penny. All very well for beginners. But *you* must have training, my dear."

"I wish," said Anne, "that 'must' meant 'can.' "

"Are you the child's mother?" Mrs. Plympton demanded, detaching her pale blue gaze unwillingly from Lee.

"Her guardian, in a way."

"What are you doing about her?"

Anne felt as if she might be sent to the foot of the class if she gave the wrong answer.

"I'm giving her as much as I can," she said rather stiffly.

Mrs. Plympton swept her from head to foot and evidently came to the conclusion that that must be very little.

The late E. Stacey Plympton had "done something" in steel; his wife's father had accomplished an equal amount in copper. This union of metals had left Mrs. Plympton in a position to gratify unhesitatingly the most extravagant

whims of an impulsive and sometimes capriciously charitable nature. Throughout the war she had fed and clothed whole towns full of French orphans, she had established a fund for the succoring of police-dogs at the front, had outfitted countless Ford sedans for the use of officers under fire. The war being over, she had allowed herself the luxury of picking up a Lancia limousine and a Brussels

"Weaving? Weaving what? Spells?"

griffon, and was now—somewhat apologetically—seeking new worlds to better. Not unnaturally she wanted to make a prima donna out of Lee, immediately. Not only that, she wanted her as a decoration, to sit at the other side of her tea table, opposite the Brussels griffon. Anne, not being acquainted with her methods, thought her somewhat demented at first.

"Indeed, indeed," she begged, "you must let us think."

"If you have any consideration for the child's future,"

said Mrs. Plympton impressively, "how can you *think* for an instant?"

Thus properly put in her place, Anne pleaded "the child's" extreme weariness as an immediate excuse for escape.

"Poor darling!" said Mrs. Plympton. "My card. I shall expect you for tea to-morrow afternoon. Five. Sharp, now!"

She kissed Lee's cheek and departed in rustling complacency to the Lancia. Anne dismissed a passing amusement that she had not offered to give the "poor darling" a lift! Lee, shorn of Charmion's gay attire, the rouge gone, the excitement over, looked extremely tired. Anne extravagantly hailed a taxi and bundled her home. They did not even attempt to talk that night of the offer so extraordinarily made that it seemed comic. But Anne lay long awake wondering what to do if it were serious. What right had she to say "no" to such opportunity? No money spared to summon the finest of masters to mold Lee's voice; a mode of life more finished than any finishing school. . . . She would have to keep hands off, of course, but a few years, so few! Then perhaps a little studio apartment of their own together.

"It isn't begging," Anne retorted to her own arguments. "If she were my own daughter would I say 'no'? She isn't my own daughter."

She rose and slipped across the room to Lee's bed, which lay in the path of faint light from the street window. She crouched beside it to gaze, as so often before, at beauty made more beautiful by sleep.

They talked it up and down and in and out in the morning.

"You could go home and paint," Lee said, "instead of playing nursemaid to me."

"It would certainly solve our present problems most thoroughly. Oh, bah—it's too silly."

And to relieve their tense nerves they poked fun at it all through lunch.

"Will you bow to me when you go by in your Rolls-Royce?"

"Will you come and hear me warble at Æolian?"

A broker who had known Anne's father was startlingly corroborative when he was called up by telephone to tell what he knew of Mrs. Plympton.

"Mrs. E. Stacey? She always does things that way. Oh, depend upon it, of course she means it. And you might just as well try to push back a steam-roller, Miss Anne!"

Anne was not sure the report cheered her. She and Lee walked through the pale gray light of the winter afternoon to Mrs. Plympton's residence, which was a four-story sandstone magnificence situated in the East Fifties near Park Avenue.

"Pinch me when it's time to wake up from this," Lee remarked as they sat waiting in the upstairs drawing-room to which a man-servant had silently shown them. "I never knew before the exact tangible form of the lap of luxury." She patted the seat of the immense overstuffed chair into which Anne had steered her.

Mrs. Plympton arrived shortly, the Brussels griffon, that costly apology for a dog, beneath her arm. She extended a sparkling hand briefly to Anne, kissed Lee, and dispatched the waiting man for tea.

"I declare I believe you make a prettier girl than

prince," she observed. "Though I don't care much for these sausage-like frocks the artists think so quaint. Come over here, child, and sit by me; I want to look at you. I'm over here; shall I take your hand?"

Lee, who was quite well aware of Mrs. Plympton's distance and location, declined the offer of the hand and took the seat that her hostess indicated beside her on the davenport.

"Now we'll go straight to the point," said Mrs. Plympton, which she proceeded to do.

Whatever feeble arguments Anne may have had were ignored or trampled upon before they had well lifted their heads. Mrs. Plympton simply took things for granted, and apparently looked for her answer nowhere but in Lee's

"I'm over here—shall I take your hand?"

glowing face. At the end of an hour, Anne heard the polished door closed behind them by the precise footman as something in a play, or a dream, or possibly a nightmare;

she was not sure which. She had a dim idea that Mrs. Plympton had graciously loaned her a dear child whom she might take out to dinner if she were very, very good and careful. Lee had, in that space of time, subtly become a part of Mrs. Plympton's household, a quite indispensable accessory. The steam-roller had crushed Anne.

VII

The dream, or whatever it was, continued preposterously. No more weaving, no more singing, lessons in Miss Rollins' stuffy little cubicle at the Organization. Instead, a sorting of belongings all over the lodgings on Forty-seventh Street, and the last dinner at Jacques' Rotisserie. They tried to pretend it wasn't the last, but of course there was only one thing to talk about.

"Fancy *living* in that huge house!" Lee said. "That one room seemed to me as big as a church, and I suppose there are dozens like it."

"Personally, I'd as lief live in a wing of the Metropolitan Museum," Anne observed. "Liefer, because at least I wouldn't have to pick out the ormolu and Louis-Louis department to set up housekeeping in, there."

"Is it ugly, do you mean?"

"No, no! It's beautiful! That is, it's expensive. It's gold and black marble and brocade and cut crystal. It's something like Versailles gone mad. Don't misunderstand me. It's a very wonderful opportunity you'll have, old darling, and I hope you'll sing like an angel for it."

"I'll try to," said Lee soberly. "Oh, Mamsy, do you suppose a footman will stand behind my chair? I won't know what to *do!*"

"Don't bother about what to do. Just be my Lee, and let the footman do the worrying."

And then there was the next morning, when the Lancia limousine really stopped for Lee and her elderly sole-leather bag which had "A. R." ingenuously on its end. Anne had no intention that Mrs. Plympton's lorgnon should witness any melodramatic farewells. Their parting was extremely brief and non-committal, but Anne was glad of the tear that splashed down on her hand from Lee's quivering eyelashes at the last. She looked rather wistfully at the little wet spot on the back of her glove as she walked slowly to Grand Central with her own bag.

The path to the white house was drifted high with snow. Anne crashed and scrambled over the crust in the twilight and bent below the icicle-hung lintel to fit her key into the lock with chilly fingers. The hall was cold with the coldness of a long-closed house in mid-winter. Anne lighted the ready-laid fire in the living-room and went down to wrestle with the furnace and the water cut-off. There was utter silence all over the house. When she came up, tired and dusty, from the cellar, the flames in the fire-place greeted her like living things and she sank down in the big chair that had been her mother's to stare wearily into them.

"I'm not as young as I used to be," she said aloud, and then was sorry she had spoken. Talking to oneself in an empty house is far worse than letting silence close in. But Anne had never been lonely in the white house before. That was because she had never before been alone in it. Those heart-breaking months just after her mother's death had been too busy and too broken for this sort of empty loneliness. This was different somehow.

"What do you expect, getting into a cold, shut-up place after dark?" Anne scolded herself. "Go and eat, woman."

She opened a can of soup and routed out some stale crackers.

It didn't seem worth while to get out dishes.

"Stupid of me not to have stopped and bought a decent chop or something," she thought.

She ate standing up beside the kitchen table. Somehow it didn't seem worth while to get out dishes in the dining-room. Why had it been worth while to get them out for Lee, who could not even see them?

"I ought to be everlastingly happy and thankful that she has such an amazing chance," Anne told herself.

But for all that she wept into her smooth, cold pillow that night as she had not wept for many years.

Lee was still extremely slipshod in her typewriting. Per cent marks crept in instead of capital T's, and M's ap-

peared instead of commas, lending to her communications a bizarre uncertainty to which Anne was well used. But with all their eccentricities they were more legible to Anne than flattened sheets of hasty Braille.

"My word, but I'm a disgusting toff!" Lee wrote to the white house. "Imagine! A little maid with a squeaky voice comes and pokes my toes into fuzzy slippers every morning and says that my bath is ready. And the first day she did take me by the right hand and conduct me into the slipperiest-tiled of bathrooms and told me the towels were on the left and the bath ahead, 'and the *mirror,*' says she, 'over here.' 'Ho-ho!' says I, laffing. Yesterday we interviewed Gavanelli, who is awe-inspiring, and he made me loop the loop with my voice, and said, 'Ah, ah!' at intervals. So that's all I know about *him.* Mrs. P. is romping me off to shop tomorrow. She has fearful ideas of how many clothes one ought to have. Do you think I ought to let her get them, or are they nominated in the bond, too? I'm sure *we* can't afford to get them, otherwise. It all makes me feel rather silly. I encountered the Brussels griffon in the flesh today. It is exceedingly like a bottle-brush and of a vile disposition. Shun them. Mrs. P.'s ideas about what I can and can't do are extraordinary, but I hope to train her, poor lady. You *do* believe I'm going to really work this time and justify this, don't you?"

The letter was signed "Charmion." Anne read it pensively and laid it with many others—the first one of which was dated ten years before—in a neat, professional hand, and began, "Dear, dear, dear Mamsy."

Mrs. Plympton did romp Lee to a great number of

shops. She heartily disapproved of the "sausage-like frocks" that Anne so simply fashioned from lengths of strange-hued fabrics, and decided at once that before Lee could properly grace the tea-table her wardrobe must be radically altered. Hence she demanded a display of taffetas and chiffons and duvetyns, and wielded her lorgnon like a scepter. The ladies of the gown salons opened folding pier-glasses for Lee, who twirled, hugely amused,

"Now, very carefully, Snider!"

before them to the shocked dismay of Mrs. Plympton. She explained why there was no need of mirrors in a penetrating aside to the gown ladies, who thereupon clucked in restrained pity, and thereafter moved about on tiptoe, greatly to Lee's chagrin.

Outside the marquise the Lancia limousine would be waiting. Mrs. Plympton would despatch the doorman for the chauffeur.

"Now, Snider, come here, please, and help Miss Kelton. Now very carefully, Snider, there's ice there on the pavement."

And Snider, breathing hard, would grasp Lee firmly beneath her elbow.

"This way, Miss. A little step down here, Miss. The car, Miss. Wait a moment, Miss. The seat directly behind you, Miss," until Lee longed to push him on top of his engine and have done with it.

In a second and less tolerant letter to Anne, she wrote: "They evidently take me to be both deaf and paralyzed. Oh, for a five-mile trot with you over Steeplejack Hill!"

The clothes being successfully purchased and disposed in the enormous closets of Lee's dressing-room, she was now equipped and ready to be exhibited to Mrs. Plympton's friends, all of whom were learning of that good lady's latest protégée. Mrs. Plympton entertained two circles; one consisting of impressive members of her own society, whose families had been congenial through several generations, the other a floating collection of "interesting people" all more or less grateful for the prestige and patronage Mrs. Plympton dispensed, and all useful in entertaining the first and more solid circle. Mrs. Plympton knew that both these groups would be eager to see Lee, the first as the object of an unusual personal charity, the second as a fellow artist. For Lee, as a pupil of Gavanelli, certainly began to rank as an artist.

A scattering from both contingents was gathered at one of Mrs. Plympton's Tuesdays in Lent, on the occasion of Lee's introduction as a member of the household. Mrs. Plympton herself conducted her into the drawing-room, and, in a too-perceptible pause, announced:

"*This* is my little blind girl."

Lee, who had been quite gracefully expectant, felt all these silent eyes robbing her of her composure; felt, too, the blood mounting to her forehead. She sought an easy attitude of expectation and achieved a posture sadly reminiscent of Willburg. She was conscious of her awkwardness and flushed the more deeply. No one was introduced to her—Mrs. Plympton's initial announcement apparently covering the situation—and she had not even an idea of how many people were in the room until the low interchange of conversation was taken up on all sides. She sat down stiffly in the chair to which Mrs. Plympton elaborately led her, hoping fervently that it was not placed in

"*This* is my little blind girl!"

a conspicuous position. She soon discovered that it was in proximity to the Brussels griffon, who was in evidence upon a fine cushion, and he was her only company until a bored,

elderly voice asked her a few measured questions about Gavanelli.

"Now, child, you must sing for us," Mrs. Plympton commanded from some distance.

Lee pleaded that Gavanelli had given her only some gymnastics as yet; that her own singing, unadorned, was no entertainment for a drawing-room. But Mrs. Plympton was anxious that the first-fruits of her philanthropy be at once garnered; she towed Lee to the piano without delay.

"Nonsense, modest child. Don't forget how enchantingly the prince sang."

Anne wouldn't have liked the orchid georgette dress, but Lee made a charming enough picture, even though the color had now died from her cheeks, leaving them as pale as they had been hot. She struck some running notes, and, after a moment of consideration, put aside all thought of Gavanelli and began to sing Purcell's *Passing By*.

The hush of the drawing-room was broken only by the subdued tinkle of tea-spoons and an occasional stage-whispered comment:

"Really extraordinary, you know!" in just the tone of comments upon the performance of trained seals at the Hippodrome.

"I know a lady sweet and kind,
Was never face so pleased my mind . . ."

Lee somehow connected the lady all at once with Anne, for no particular reason. But the last time she had sung *Passing By* had been at the white house, in September, with Mamsy leaning beside the piano humming an uncertain second.

"But change the earth or change the sky
Yet will I love her till I die . . ."

There was an unintentional tremor in Lee's voice in the last lines, which was more than art. She swung aside on the piano bench, as a brief, well-bred clapping applauded the end of the song. People had been drinking tea during her singing, but none seemed to be forthcoming for Lee, and very soon Mrs. Plympton rustled to her side.

"Now you run along, my dear. The song was exquisite. Howard, take Miss Kelton, please. This would bore you, child," she added in a firm undertone.

As a matter of fact, Lee had caught the edge of a most alluring conversation between some of the "interesting" people about modern Russian music, which she longed to join or at least listen to. But the hand of Howard, the young footman, gripped her elbow with the supporting grasp that Mrs. Plympton and all her retainers seemed to think necessary, and propelled Lee out of the drawing-room and into the tiny electric lift which operated between the floors.

Alone in her room, the gilded grandeur of which was not altogether apparent to her, she lost her temper thoroughly. The little maid had laid out tea alluringly for her on a lacquered teapoy, and Lee was much tempted to throw the spoons at her, as she had done to Mrs. Darrah long ago at Willburg.

"What ails the woman?" thought Lee, decoyed at last by the pleasant smell of the toasted scones into grudgingly partaking. "Does she think I'll pour my tea into my saucer, or slop it on to the Brussels griffon, or ask to be fed with a spoon, that I'm banished to the nursery?"

Then she savagely indited a letter to Anne on the new portable typewriter that Mrs. Plympton had purchased for her offhand the day before. The letter was rather less legible than usual, owing to Lee's temper and her unfamiliarity with the new keyboard. "I'd no idea I was to be a monkey on a stick," she wrote. After some consideration she tore the letter into small bits and dropped them into her fireplace. Then she stood up and practiced Gavanelli's gymnastics for an hour and a half; in fact, till the little maid came to help her dress for dinner. Which Lee considered another insult, not quite realizing that it was the maid's business, and that Mrs. Plympton expected the assistance Lee tried to decline.

VIII

It was a new life, and strange; more than physical readjustment to it was necessary. A formality of mind that Lee had never practiced dominated the whole of this existence. But more than anything, she was lonely, inexpressibly lonely, far lonelier than she had been at Willburg. Mrs. Plympton breakfasted in bed and occupied herself all morning with correspondence and business. Lee drove alone in the limousine through a maze of meaningless streets; she wandered cautiously in the great high rooms, not daring often to examine the ugly ornaments, which she knew Mrs. Plympton prized, for fear of breaking something on the heavily loaded marble tables or massive mantels. She sent to the library for well-thumbed Braille books, most of which she had read long ago. In the afternoon, following a circumspect lunch with Mrs. Plympton, her patroness would read bits of the newspaper

aloud and long passages to herself. Frequently the lady went out to tea, but Lee did not often go with her. She seldom lacked the unwelcome company of the Brussels griffon, who materialized noiselessly in unexpected places, only yapping after Lee had stumbled over him.

"Some day," she wrote Anne, "I shall really come a cropper over that priceless porcupine, and either he or I will be no more."

Of course her chief resource and occupation was, quite properly, her singing. Gavanelli gave her plenty to do, having been urged by Mrs. Plympton to accomplish as much as he could in the shortest time possible. So Lee worked, and worked hard. "Which, after all," she reflected, "is what I'm here for."

Little by little the physical luxury, which at first had seemed like an indignity, something planned to spare her in what Mrs. Plympton was pleased to call her affliction, became an accepted form of life. She no longer tried to assert her independence in a household where independence was taken from one by skilled servitors who earned a substantial wage doing it. Proud of her capability, she tried in the beginning to exhibit it to its fullest extent, but she soon found out that Mrs. Plympton would have frowned upon such behavior even in a seeing young lady.

And people told her she was wonderful, lots of them, frequently. She began to have more opportunity at the Tuesdays to talk with the guests. One and all they agreed that she was wonderful; her voice, her appearance, her manner, the fact, apparently, that she looked and behaved very much like a human being although she was blind. If one hears a thing often enough one begins to think it must contain at least a grain of truth. Lee wondered if per-

haps, after all, she were not something rather remarkable. But despite all this there was an odd relief about the advent of one person who neither praised nor pitied.

This was Constance Finley, who was briefly introduced to Lee by Mrs. Plympton as "some one a little nearer your own age, my dear." She was several years older than Lee, a tall, gracious girl, with smooth seal-brown hair coiled beneath a russet toque, and clear golden-brown eyes alight with interest in the pageant of living. She pulled up a chair and sat down at once beside Lee.

"I've wanted to meet you all afternoon. I did so like the way you sang; as if you were listening to it yourself, if you know what I mean by that."

Lee did know exactly what she meant.

"Not just pumping it out for the mob?" she said. They laughed.

"I love that little ditty about Woodstock Town," said Miss Finley. "I always thought the poor lady was so sprightly to go running about the meadows after flowers when her heart was a-breaking."

"Do you know it, too?" cried Lee, really pleased. "It was a bold sort of experiment. I think Mrs. Plympton's friends would rather have very proper grand chamber music, or else something queer and modern."

"People seem to be very much afraid of liking things they can understand," Miss Finley said. "Do you suppose it's because they don't want to be thought guileless and simple-minded and incapable of understanding anything less obvious, or what? But haven't you noticed it?"

Lee was tremendously cheered. She had noticed it indeed, and had begun to feel slightly ashamed of her liking

for the more simple and transparent manifestations of life and art.

"It's a fact," she declared. "They say, 'Ah, how stupendous!' over some ugly little string of discords that I'm sure they must hate, and turn up their noses at something that *must* be true because it's beautiful."

"I've just seen and heard something which isn't wholly beautiful, and is certainly too fantastic to be true, but quite gorgeous and exciting; the *Ballet Russe,*" said Miss Finley. "Have you been? You ought to see it! It's different from anything else. A little frightening, I think, in a way."

Lee hesitated. "Do you know," she said, "that I can't see?"

"I know. But would it matter? The air was so full of colored music—flaming with it. Sometimes I had to shut my eyes to hear it properly."

What an extraordinary person to suppose that perhaps not seeing might not matter! Every one else seemed to think it mattered so hugely.

"I'd *love* to go!" Lee cried.

"Well, let's!" said Miss Finley, surprisingly. "I want to go again. It's impossible to hold it all in one time. Why don't we? Have you seen *Dear Brutus?* I hear it's joyous—Barrie and William Gillette; it ought to be! Let's go to that, too. And, oh, perhaps the nicest thing of all to do—have you ever been to the Russian Cathedral?"

"I certainly haven't," said Lee. "I didn't know there was one."

"There is; Greek Orthodox, you know. It's mystery and magic. I'm afraid my mother thinks I'm demented;

I never go to church with her any more. Will you go with me next Sunday?"

"I'd adore to," said Lee, in a trance. So many diversions had never before been offered her in a breath. But it was not only the offers, it was the eager, frank friendship in the voice that made them which swept her along like a sea-breeze.

"Dear me!" said Miss Finley, "people are leaving in droves. I must be off, too. But I wanted to talk about ballads; you probably know quantities that I don't. Do you know *Sir Eglamore?"*

Lee didn't. "Do you know *The Nightingale?"*

Miss Finley didn't. "Never mind," she said reluctantly. "We'll swap some more on Sunday morning. The Russian church begins piously early; can you be ready if I stop by at a bit before ten?"

"I'll be up at crack of dawn," said Lee.

Figuratively speaking, she was. Her mind was up and about, running on pleasant things, before the first bell chimed in the city for early service. Constance Finley stopped for her at quarter to ten. Mrs. Plympton, who was reading the magazine section of the *Times* before church, parted the rose silk curtains and peered down upon the empty street.

"How did you get here, Constance?" she inquired.

"Afoot," said Miss Finley briskly. "That's why I came a bit early, so we'd have time to walk."

"You'd better let me send for Snider," said Mrs. Plympton decidedly. "He will be able to get back in time to take me to St. Thomas's."

"But—thanks ever so much, Mrs. Plympton. I think we'd rather walk. That is, I should. How about you?"

She turned to Lee. "It's only twenty-five blocks or so."

"Twenty-five blocks!" gasped Mrs. Plympton as if Constance had said twenty-five miles. "Lee, child, you can't possibly walk so far!"

"I think I'd like to," said Lee meekly, and Constance, seizing the opportunity, beamed on Mrs. Plympton and took herself and Lee out of the room without more delay.

"Dear Mrs. Plympton has the most curious idea that because I can't see, I can't walk," said Lee, when they were swinging up the Avenue elbow to elbow.

"You mean she has a curious idea that because she doesn't like to walk herself no one else does," said Constance. She touched Lee's arm ever so lightly, and Lee stepped off the curbstone with no hesitation.

"Do you mind telling me," said Lee, "how you happen to have so much sense? *Thank* you for not supporting my feeble frame over the crossing."

Constance laughed shortly. "Oh, I helped to mother a brood of boys at the Phare in France last year; boys who'd had their eyes more or less done for. I just discovered that they continued to be human beings, that's all."

"Simple fact, isn't it?" said Lee.

"Exceedingly," said Miss Finley, and they began exchanging names of ballads.

The Park was iron-hard and gray; the tennis-courts were skimmed with dull ice. A few chilly equestrians galloped frostily around the reservoir, their horses steaming, their own breath blue about their nipped ears. Lee heard the click of hoofs on frozen ground.

"Do you ride?" she asked.

"I stick on," said Constance. "My small brother and I

do peculiar stunts in the summertime with a most generous ex-polo pony."

They turned abruptly into a side street and almost at once entered the Cathedral of St. Nicholas. The pungent praise of the incense smote Lee's nostrils with as definite a sensation as the choiring voices smote her heart. There was something tragic, and thrilling, and very old in the music. No organ swelled the volume of sound; unaccompanied and in perfect harmony the men and boys poured out this ancient, minor chant, without notes, without other guidance than the lifted hands of their leader who stood among them on the gallery. During pauses, Constance, in a few low words, tried to give Lee some idea of it all; the priests moving slowly through the haze of sweet smoke, bending with stately precision in their stiff robes of sea-green and silver, the bishop on his dais being solemnly vested with brocaded cope and emerald studded miter. He crossed his mystic triple tapers, his eyes were visionary, they passed beyond the bowing crowd. A boy in a glistening robe of blue, with a rim of scarlet cassock glowing beneath, advanced slowly with a golden candlestick taller than he. A procession, bearing golden book and glinting crozier, wove about among the crowd that stood or knelt on the bare floor. The priests chanted in deep voices of thunder; the choir answered in a mounting wail of melody, the sopranos striving upward till the sorrowful ancient ecstasy seemed to smite the floor of Heaven. The little tapers at the dim blue shrines flickered through the smoke of the incense; the far lamp at the back of the sanctuary smoldered blood-red. An old woman kneeling beside Lee muttered, "Boje moï, Boje moï," again and again.

Lee felt that she must weep if the insistent beauty of the

poignant anthems did not stop. When it did, the jostle of the alien crowd moving out of the church smote her with its amazing incongruity.

"Is it New York or heaven?" she asked Constance, when they had reached the Avenue. "No wonder you couldn't tell me what it was like beforehand."

Constance went into an elaborate and detailed description of the gorgeous vestments, the strange censers, the rosy little acolytes who flapped in and out of mysterious doors, the shrines at which the faithful lighted tapers constantly, no matter what part of the service might be going on, the black and red and gold robes of the choir, the inspired and saintly face of the bearded bishop.

"Do you suppose Mrs. Plympton would think I was a heretic if I never went to St. Thomas's with her again?"

"Well," said Constance, "I'm sure I don't know what all the things they do at the Cathedral mean, but I *am* sure that anything that makes me feel as ancient and beautiful and holy as that music, must be as good for my soul as yawning over Doctor Somebody's sermon."

They went again the following Sunday, having gone to *Dear Brutus* during the intervening week, and this time Constance took Lee home with her for dinner. The Finleys lived in a large apartment that rambled all over a top floor which looked down on the bare trees of the Park. Lee missed, of course, the color of Chinese ornament and Eastern tapestry, Persian rug and peacock blue pottery, that wove a rich pattern throughout the rooms. But there was a living fire crackling on the hearth (Mrs. Plympton's fireplaces were all swept clean and her chimneys unblackened) and there was an open grand piano with ragged music piled on it, and bowls of primroses on the long window sill, and

the books Lee touched on the table opened easily as if they had been much read and much enjoyed. These details she encountered gradually; she caught the sense of the place at once.

Mrs. Finley took Lee's hand heartily. "Another Greek Orthodox! Constance tries to play their dirges on the piano with one finger. You're a musician, she tells me; perhaps you can help us out!"

The "small brother," a fair-headed boy of sixteen, was stringing a violin, and laid it hastily on the piano with a clatter to shake hands with Lee.

"I'll let it stretch while we're at dinner," he told his mother. "Then perhaps it'll stay put when we want it."

"We always play a bit on Sunday afternoon," Mrs. Finley explained. "We won't make you and Constance listen, however."

"We'll listen, right enough," her daughter assured her. "And Lee Kelton must sing *Woodstock Town,* et cetera, too."

"Of course," said Mrs. Finley. "Ah, here's Father. Dinner, my dear, awaits you."

Dinner was delightful. There was no watchful butler behind a screen, but an adequate maid who appeared when necessary. Mr. Finley carved.

"If you could furnish me with a ground plan of the beast beforehand, I might succeed better," he observed. He was an architect and a distinguished one.

"Mamsy would love them!" Lee found herself thinking constantly. She never wished to share the happenings of Mrs. Plympton's establishment with Anne. But she longed for her now, when they were gathered in the living-room talking over their coffee. Then the boy tested the new

string and pronounced it sufficiently stretched, and his mother put aside her cup and went to the piano. She played, not faultlessly, but with sympathy and a love of beauty, and the boy followed gravely with careful bowing and young, half-expressed emotion in the lovely passages. They played the easiest bits in some of the Beethoven violin sonatas, and Mr. Finley smoked a cigarette in a long amber holder, and Lee and Constance sat on the window-seat beside the primroses.

Afterward, Lee sang all the ballads she knew, and Constance brought out an old book that held some new treasures —and lo! the afternoon was gone.

"I was about to suggest that Con and I walk home with you—the Park is rather lovely—but I hear that the faithful Snider has arrived," said Mr. Finley.

"Snider," said Lee, "is like the clock striking twelve in the fairy tales. The magic always stops then."

"Excellent compliment!" said Mr. Finley. "Snider's mainspring should be put out of order!"

The friendship of Constance Finley was a delight which, for Lee, grew with the spring. Of course there were, as before, long stretches of boredom in the great house, of hard practice, of empty leisure, of stifling luxury. The luxury, however, was becoming more and more a matter of course. Lee rather cultivated a grand manner, at first to please Mrs. Plympton, who had adamant ideas of what a well-bred young woman should be. Later it grew more unconscious. She could, however, doff it like a coat when she played with Constance Finley, keeping it principally for Tuesday afternoons. When she forgot to take it off, Constance brought her up sharply.

"Don't put on such side, Lee. It ill becometh you."

They saw each other quite often. They walked, and read, and sang, and went to concerts and the Russian church; and in the course of it all Constance heard about Mamsy, and Lee heard of her friend's childhood abroad and in the huge, genial, Revolutionary house in Connecticut where the Finleys still spent their summers. An eager, golden childhood it must have been, with art and beauty to live for, and plenty of money, but no thought taken of it. And Constance was thinking of what Lee had told her.

"It must have been rather hideous," she said, "going away from her like that, to that place."

"It's hard to remember how it was at first," Lee said. "But something just happened to me that never quite came back. I suppose there's really a sort of hole somewhere in my life that never was altogether filled up. Though I learned a lot, too. A lot. Perhaps it was good for me."

"Perhaps," said Constance. "Poor little Lee! I don't believe Mamsy particularly enjoyed it, either."

"Oh, I don't know. I should think she'd have been glad to get rid of me and have some time to paint. Mamsy never seems to fly to pieces about things the way I do. Now, last autumn she just packed up her things and went home. I suppose it must be rather dull there."

"Is she all alone?"

"Yes," said Lee, suddenly picturing, with some surprise, the exceeding dullness of the empty white house. It hadn't occurred to her that Mamsy, too, might be bored.

"I'd like to know Mamsy," said Constance thoughtfully.

IX

Anne was heartily sorry when she heard that Mrs. Plympton was taking Lee to the South Shore for the hot weather. She had hoped silently that Lee might come back to the white house during the short holiday that Gavanelli sanctioned. But Mrs. Plympton had no such intention. Having once put her hand to the plow, she did not look back. If Lee was to be a successful singer, to Mrs. E. Stacey Plympton was to belong the glory. She intended to give "this Ramsey woman," as she insisted on calling Anne, to Lee's annoyance, no chance of influencing Lee, possibly persuading her to stay at home and leave unfinished what Mrs. Plympton had determined to see complete.

So Lee's wardrobe was augmented to suit the hot weather fashions, and Mrs. Plympton and her entourage, including the Brussels griffon, left New York to get along as best it might without them.

All the Finleys went abroad. Lee received a joyous postcard from Constance, sent back by the pilot boat, and thereafter dropped out of communication for some time. Lee occasionally wondered where they were and what they were doing.

The summer places were gay with the excitements of a younger set who figured little in Mrs. Plympton's winter activities. They rode and swam and danced and played tennis violently and continuously, and Lee was included in none of their doings. She did not expect to be included in the tennis, nor had she ever sat a horse, but dancing she adored and she swam extremely well. Mrs. Plympton was horrified.

"If something should happen! My dear Lee, you know it isn't as if you were like the others. I shouldn't *dare* to let you go into the water."

There seemed to be no valid reason why dancing was dangerous, but Lee had nevertheless no opportunities for dancing She was quite well aware that if she had been Mrs. Plympton's daughter she would have been asked to the nightly parties in the pavilions. She was not Mrs. Plympton's daughter. Anne was very glad that Lee was excluded from the revels, and intimated as much in a letter, to which Lee replied that Anne evidently didn't care whether she was happy or not.

Before the end of the season, however, Lee did taste several crumbs from society's feast. Beth Griswold probably had more money and spent less of it on herself than any other young woman in the colony. She was just Lee's age. She adored animals with more than the appraising fondness of the sporting woman. Anything dependent summoned her instantly to its service and protection. Lee was dependent. Beth declared to her crowd that it was rotten the way the kid was shelved, and proceeded to elbow a place for her in the rather tightly drawn circle of her friends.

Beth habitually wore very expensive tweed clothes very negligently assembled, and was usually followed by an inanely devoted bevy of setter pups, gawky and gangling despite their pedigrees. Thus attired and accompanied, she would stop by for Lee and hale her off for a hike on the beach. Lee was slightly disturbed by the puppies, which had a way of plunging unexpectedly about one's legs, but she much appreciated Beth's sympathetic ear, into which she poured many of her hopes and fears, pent up since Con-

stance's departure. Beth listened more or less attentively, and occasionally shied things into the water for the puppies.

"It must be great to sing," Beth volunteered. "I heard

Beth listened more or less attentively.

you up at the Casino that night, you know. Gosh, I can't even whistle *The Sheik!*"

"But I can't really sing, yet," Lee protested. "I've got to work like anything."

"Sounded tophole to me," Beth assured her. "A lot better than some of these opera song-birds. I always curl up at the back of the box and have a nap, but I listened in on every bit of it when you were— Hey, Larry! For the love of Pete come away from the dead fish! Down, boy, drop it!"

With swift, competent, brown hands she collared the unmannerly pup and dragged him bodily away from the de-

funct flounder he had so delightedly discovered. Lee had to listen for some time to remarks on dog discipline before she could guide the conversation back to her own interests.

"I wish I knew more about the way audiences feel. They have a real psychology, you know; it's quite a study in itself. I suppose it might help a lot if you could see at least the first few rows."

"I'm rotten at figuring out deep things," Beth said. "I flunked Psych. last year at Vassar, worse luck." She was slightly uneasy, as she always became at mention of Lee's lack of sight.

"Well, what do *you* do when you're audience?" Lee inquired. "I've never sung yet in public, really in public, I mean, at a sure-enough recital. I suppose the creaks and the stillness and the coughs are multiplied a thousand times. Do you just sit and stare at the person all the time, or read your program, or what?"

"Oh," said Beth, "if it's a musical show, I take in all the rigs, and if it's a mystery play I try to grow extra eyes to get on to which one the crook really is, and if it's an opera—I told you what I do: try to make up a little lost sleep."

"That's what you'd do, then, at a song recital?" Lee inquired mischievously.

"Oh, golly, not yours, Lee, of course! You sing so a fellow can really hear what you're talking about and understand it. I think those old ballads are great. We dug out some pretty swift ones in English A last year; pity you can't sing 'em as is in polite society."

Lee laughed, though she was slightly shocked. There was a thud of hoofs on the sand, and a hatless youth pulled up a polo pony at the edge of the tide.

"Get your darn dogs out of the way, Beth," he demanded

without other salutation, "before Jeff steps on a couple of 'em."

Beth rallied the puppies with peremptory whistlings, nudged Lee vigorously, and whispered:

"Bob Weeks; met him at the Casino, didn't you?"

Lee, who had been trying vainly to place the voice, smiled in the direction of the pony's snufflings and said, "How do you do, Mr. Weeks?"

"Oh, hullo," said the youth. "Coming to the jamboree to-night, Beth? Hot dog, you'd better; some party. Jake and I running it; recommendation, yes?" With which he clucked to Jeff and was gone.

"Don't suppose you'd like to come?" Beth asked, and Lee snatched at something that might be construed as an invitation.

"I think I'd love to. What's it to be?"

"Oh, a crazy party on the beach—toasting marshmallows and so forth. They're all perfectly blah; I don't know whether you'd have any fun or not."

Was there ever so slight an accent on the "you"? Lee had grown perhaps over-sensitive to accents.

"Of course," said Beth, "I'd *adore* having you come along, if you'd enjoy it. But it's such a bore, I think, when they get so cuckoo."

"I wonder why people always assume that I shouldn't enjoy anything that's going on," Lee flashed out.

"It's just because I *do* want you to enjoy things," Beth cried. "You're awfully different, you know; you wouldn't—"

"There it is! I'm different! Oh, can't any one ever forget it?"

"I don't *mean* because you—because you can't see," Beth explained desperately, flushing to her smooth, well-brushed

hair. "I mean you're different every way—inside. We're a lot of nuts, bored to tears by the things you like. All the boys think you're pretty, but an awful highbrow. Lee, you don't think I'm a rotter to tell you that straight?"

"Of course not. Thanks. I'm not a highbrow, though; a shocking little ignoramus."

She was glad they thought her pretty. What had she said to them that had made them think her a highbrow? She had tried to talk about the things that had always interested her and Constance and the people the Finleys knew; very simple things. She determined to listen more carefully to the current conversations and try to capture the jargon. It would be jolly, this party. She remembered toasting marshmallows with Mamsy that summer on the beach after Willburg. The stillness, and the snap of the fire, the beat of the sea, Mamsy guiding her toasting stick to the embers and laughingly retrieving charred marshmallows.

The party, indefinitely chaperoned by two very young matrons, was already assembled around an immense bonfire when Lee and Beth reached the spot that evening. It was still the era when blinded soldiers jocularly rated themselves as "blinks" and "half-blinks." Lee would not have been particularly elated to know that she was identified as "Beth's blink" among the merrymakers. A ukulele, a banjo-mandolin, and a persistent snare-drum were drowning the undeterred sound of the waves, and on the hard-packed sand several couples were fox-trotting eerily in the firelight. More frankfurters than would be good for a party of any size bulged from paper packages, and innumerable boxes of marshmallows were being cut open by assiduous youths with

penknives. Several men and maidens were tickling one another with toasting sticks. Some of this scene was lost upon Lee, though the strumming of the improvised orchestra and the shrieks incident to the tickling smote her quite forcibly.

Beth sat her down with an air of finality between a very shy youth and one of the chaperons who had played bridge till three that morning and was yawning. Bob Weeks dealt Lee a stick in passing, and some one else jabbed a marshmallow upon the point of it. She dared not try to toast it herself for fear of burning it to a crisp or holding it where fire was not; and in either case making herself ridiculous. She rated herself for a spineless coward. Why not be frank —or at least ingratiating—and coyly ask the shy youth to come to her assistance? After some hesitation she covertly ate the marshmallow raw, and thrust her stick behind her in the sand. Shorn of the topics of music, books one had read, plays one had been to—all things she had never dreamed of considering "highbrow"—she found herself singularly silent. The shy youth once remarked, "Fire's darn bright, isn't it?" and then melted into confusion, and the chaperon went to sleep with her pretty head on the knee of the other chaperon's husband.

Presently the firelight winked on several pocket flasks, and somebody conceived the idea of saturating the marshmallows with the contents and then toasting them. The result was excellent, and "Scotch marshmallows à la Bacardi" became universally popular. A new pastime arose, that of the girls aiming marshmallows at the boys' wide open mouths from some distance, thereby wasting any quantity of the candy and ruining a number of expensive camel's-hair sweaters. As the proportion of Scotch and Bacardi grew and the marshmallows lessened, the conversation waxed in

volume and waned in coherency. The orchestra's rhythms grew more eccentric than even jazz warranted, and the dancers invented steps to fit the music as they went along. There was a slight scuffle very near Lee, and some one said:

"Don't waste it on her; the little highbrow wouldn't drink it anyway."

The chaperon waked up sufficiently to say, "Don't get rough, dears," and went to sleep again.

Lee, very ill at ease and wondering where Beth was, got up and walked alone a little way down the beach, where she could easily enough hear the party but not be of it. Beth, sitting gloomily on the other side of the fire, watched her go and scowled.

"Where's your pep, Beth? Better have a drink," a boy suggested.

"Had quite enough," Beth returned.

"Booze always gets Beth glum. What's eating you, Beth?" another demanded.

Lee sat down on the slope of a dune and let the sea air blow across her face, too much heated by the leaping fire and her own mental discomfort. Strangely enough, this party had spoiled for her even the memory of that other marshmallow toasting with Mamsy.

"I hate it, yet I suppose that's just why they think I'm a highbrow," she mused. "But there must be something jolly about it, or they wouldn't all have such a good time. What is it? Is it because I can't see that I don't get it? Would Beth know?"

There was a sliding of sand and a figure plumped down beside her. The voice of Bob Weeks, somewhat altered by many "Scotch marshmallows" spoke enthusiastically.

"Some party, yes? You run away—whaffor? Wanto be more soshble, I guess; twosome's always a lot more soshble, izzen it, Lee?"

"Yes, quite a party, Mr. Weeks. It was rather too hot by the fire, though." Lee thought this sounded stupid and very prim, but she *didn't* want him to sit so near her, and she could not cordially agree with all his remarks.

"Always call Bob," the young man stated. "Misher Weeks too highbrow. 'Sgreat here, yes? Nice'n cool. Less put our head on our lap, yes? More comf'ble."

He proceeded to carry out his suggestion, whereat Lee rose hastily and ran against Beth, who had just climbed the dune in somber silence.

"Bob, you shrimp, you're tight," she observed. "Go and sit in the sea. Come on, Lee, it's time little girls were in bed."

And with no further parley she marched Lee off across the sands.

"You see, I told you that you wouldn't enjoy it. I'm sorry, old dear, but I *said* you were different, didn't I?"

"I tried to think it was fun," Lee apologized. "I know you all think I'm a perfect stiff. Would it be jollier if I could see what you're all doing?"

"Oh, Lord, just as well you don't!" Beth cried. "Why try to get keen on it, Lee? I don't care a darn for it; have to trot around with the crowd because it's my set and I'd lose face if I didn't. Just because we all happen to have a lot of money, and I have more than some of us. I'd liefer chuck all the tin to some poorhouse and walk the pups on the beach, personally, but there'd be a horrible row. They're all bored to tears, and get tight to forget the fact. Why on earth try to get into it, Lee, when you really aren't bored

by your own things? Besides," she continued inaudibly, "you could never really get in because you're blind and nobody, so what's the use, even if you wanted to?"

As Lee was carrying on an exactly similar train of thought in her own mind, they came to the steps of Mrs. Plympton's villa, rather soberly silent.

"You're awfully decent to me, Beth," Lee said.

"Oh, blah!" said Beth. "I like you. At first I wanted to jazz you around in all this stuff because I thought you needed pepping up; then I got to know you better and—well, you remember how I hauled the Larry-pup away from that deceased flounder this afternoon?"

"Yes," said Lee.

"Well?" said Beth, significantly.

Mrs. Plympton was horrified that the two had arrived alone. Beth airily outlined that the party was not half over, couldn't remember the names of the chaperons, but, oh, yes, there were *two,* and said that Lee was much admired.

"Beth, child, you must *not* walk home alone. Where's your own car?"

"Oh, some boy borrowed it. I suppose I'll see it tomorrow morning," Beth explained. "If you're really going to be unhappy, Mrs. Plympton, I'll whistle up Snider and let your car do the job. May I?"

With which she slapped Lee on the shoulder—a slap full of cheer and sympathy—and went out to the house telephone to call the garage.

X

The return in early autumn to the monotonous round of Mrs. Plympton's town life brought a new wave of rebellion.

Lee fought it out quite alone, and Anne unfortunately missed completely this phase of her child's mental processes. Indeed, Anne was becoming disturbingly out of touch. She had agreed to keep hands off, and she remained at the white house with them resolutely behind her.

Lee sat on the edge of her ivory-tinted chaise longue and reasoned it out audibly.

"It's an unbearable position—me and the Brussels griffon left behind when anything is afoot where we might disgrace ourselves. But if I chuck it now, what about Gavanelli? I'd try to make a go of it myself and fail, probably, and quite naturally everybody would say, 'What can you expect when the little fool throws away opportunities like that?' Mamsy would be hideously disappointed, for one. If I fail anyway, it won't be because I didn't have the chance. . . . And my new fur coat is awfully nice . . ."

She described the fur coat all over a letter to Mamsy, who replied, "How giddy! All is vanity, saith the preacher," and let it go at that.

At Mrs. Plympton's first afternoon that winter, Lee might have seen Beth Griswold again if that young woman had chosen to see her.

"There's your little blink over by the tea-table," a débutante hastened to inform Beth.

"I see her," said Beth, turning her handsome head lazily and slowly meeting Lee's unknowing eyes. And she walked away to speak to some one else. She told herself that it was a cowardly thing to do, taking an unsportsmanlike advanvantage. If Lee had been able to see her she must needs, by a cordial nod at least, have renewed the acquaintance. There on the beach, hiking with the puppies, it had been

very different; a self-imposed charge easily fulfilled. Added to the round of winter gayeties, the taxing social demands, it would be too much, friendship for this girl, so dependent physically and spiritually on the time and capabilities of others. It would be a burden. Beth bit her lip and turned her back upon Lee. She was not wholly selfish. It had been difficult enough to include Lee in some of the free and easy doings of the summer crowd. In the more formal activities of the winter season the snubbing would be more apparent, and Beth knew well that Lee would gain far more wounds than pleasures from her attempted friendship.

But Lee was a burden: to Mrs. Plympton, who spoke pettishly when she disarranged a curtain or tripped over the Brussels griffon; to Gavanelli, who stormed over her slowness in transcribing written notes; to Snider and Howard and the squeaky maid; even, momentarily, to the gentleman who, in putting down his cup near her now, refrained from addressing her, thinking, "What should I find to say to her, cut off from everything?" A burden, perhaps, to almost every one but Mamsy. Mamsy, who never lost patience, who always remembered what little things meant most, who treated Lee as a normal person and hence found her a normal person; who, in short, loved her because she was Lee and never doubted her because she was blind. But Mamsy seemed farther away than months and miles, somehow; too far away to be appealed to.

Constance Finley, who had never seemed to feel Lee a burden, was apparently not yet back from abroad. There had been a postcard from her at Sorrento, and two letters from the south of France where they had spent most of the summer, but the intimacy seemed somehow cut by the dis-

tance between; words three weeks old from across the sea lacked the vivid pleasure of contact and comradeship.

Lee, sitting alone near the tea-table, in the aloofness her blindness made, was partly aware of the wall Mrs. Plympton's words of explanation had built about her in this little world of the drawing-room. Happily she was spared all the curious glances that rested upon her, then slipped on eagerly to more responsive faces. But she was not spared Beth's characteristic laugh and clear boyish voice as she bade her hostess good-by.

"Was—that Beth Griswold?" Lee asked hastily of some one near her, she cared not who.

"Yes, you know her? She was looking right at you."

"Oh! I've met her," said Lee stiffly.

She excused herself almost at once and made her own way competently from the drawing-room, to the horror of Mrs. Plympton who would have summoned a servant. Lee ignored the lift and raced up the deep-carpeted stairs to her own room. She wanted to think things out a little. Beth had been there—looked at her—cut her dead—shunned her —and gone away. Beth was ashamed to recognize her, ashamed to continue the friendship she had so cordially begun in the summer. It had been charity, then, had it—pity, a pastime? Lee, furious and cut to the heart, alternately pounded the circular satin cushion of the chaise longue and spotted it with her tears.

She flatly refused to appear at the next Tuesday affair. Mrs. Plympton was annoyed and intimated that Lee was ungrateful.

"Little Tommy Tucker sings for his supper," said Lee, fortunately under her breath. But it was true that Mrs.

Plympton expected Lee to entertain her guests with appropriate music.

"After all," thought Lee, "I don't know that *she's* getting much out of this bargain except a philanthropic satisfaction." So she compromised and said she would appear the following Tuesday if she might be let off this time.

She was sprawling in a big chair in her room, the typewriter beside her, wondering what she should write to Anne that wouldn't sound too peevish, when the squeaky maid rapped and entered.

"Some one has partickly asked for you in the drawing-room, Miss. Will you wear the lavender crêpe de Chine, Miss?"

Who on earth could it be—a penitent Beth? If it were, how to meet her? Lee pondered as the little maid's nimble fingers attended to the numerous hooks and snaps of the lavender crêpe de Chine. But when she reached the drawing-room, it was Constance Finley's eager voice that said "Lee!" above all the babble of the company.

"Constance! Bless your heart! But how formal! Since when do you have to call upon me on salon afternoons in the drawing-room?"

"Well," said Constance, "it had to be rather formal on account of Ian. I have to show him to people, you see. We all of us got back only a few days ago. Come, I want to show him to you. He wants to meet you."

"Who in the world is Ian?" Lee demanded.

Constance took her across the room. "This is Ian," she said. "I'm going to marry him some day if he's good."

A deep, delighted laugh came as a large, fine hand grasped Lee's.

"Perfidious one!" Lee exclaimed. "Oh, who would have guessed!"

"We announced it in Brittany this fall," Constance explained apologetically. "Oh, here's Mother; she'll want to see you. She's been collecting ancient Breton ditties that you'll gloat over. She's been perfectly daft over them all the way across."

"And Con keeps telling me how wonderfully you'll sing them," declared Ian, who seemed to be gigantic, judging from the height at which his big voice emanated.

"We must get together at once," Constance said. "Oh, it's fun to be home! Come to tea tomorrow, why not? This man and I will pick you up. Oh, here come some people; I'll have to show him to them."

Lee went to tea with them next day, and tried over Breton refrains, and listened to much joyous interchange of travel reminiscence and local merriment, which she enjoyed because of its intrinsic fun and interest. But Constance was all for Ian, of course; why should she not be? Their plans were already afoot for a studio apartment down town; Ian was a designer of stained glass, among other things. They were to be married early in the summer.

Constance came to tea with Lee and talked about Ian as little as possible. Lee went to lunch with Constance, and Ian happened in. He had, it seems, found an entrancing second-hand shop never before discovered: and if there weren't real Chippendales perched on top of atrocious golden oak bureaus in the back room, then he was an organ-grinder. They must go and see; wouldn't Lee come along? She went with them, and was sorry she did. They wanted to furnish their apartment—even in imagination—without having to

manufacture conversation of general interest. That is, they thought they had to. Lee would have been quite enough entertained by the expedition itself, without their efforts to include her in all their little plans. The Chippendales turned out to be poor imitations after all, but they bought a mammoth beaten brass tea-kettle on an immense iron stand, and Ian had to hire a taxi to accommodate it.

A mammoth beaten brass tea-kettle.

"Preposterous!" said Mrs. Finley when this was unloaded before her. "Father will have to design a house for you on purpose to fit it!"

It was lots of fun, but Lee was keen enough to see that it would be more fun for Ian and Constance without her.

"Not at *all*," said Constance. "We're not the silly sort, *are* we, Ian?"

"I think we're uncommonly silly!" said Ian. Then they laughed at each other.

Lee refused most of Constance's invitations because she felt, perhaps too self-consciously, that she would interfere with whatever family plans might be arranged, and that they were only doing it to be nice, anyway. They were nice; Lee longed for them. How jolly they were, with their absurd kettle, and their solemn conversations about window curtains for an apartment not even found yet, and their ridiculous satisfaction over being able to sing French songs in parts, though Ian's bass was shockingly off at times. This would be a new home, a new life, something where nothing had been before. Constance with her own apartment, her own piano, her own hearth and candlelight, her husband. . . . Lee pondered over the mystery of it. Already Constance was subtly a different person. She didn't go to the Russian church because Ian would rather walk or play music at the apartment. She didn't read to Lee because she and Ian were reading *Pour la Patrie* and Lee didn't know quite enough French to enjoy it. "How dull of us," said Constance. "We're going to read *Queen Victoria* next; you *must* come and listen in."

But Lee didn't, somehow. Gavanelli was working her rather hard. She found herself tired, and discouraged a little. No reason for being discouraged, she scolded herself. Gavanelli promised her great things, in his mocking way that she never took seriously. Well, suppose she were a success. Suppose some one asked her to marry him, as Ian had asked Constance. Not that any one ever would, of course, she hastened to pull up her runaway thoughts. He'd be a bold spirit, or very foolish. But if he should—what would she say? Could she ever give him what he would need and deserve; could she be anything but a burden? This was perfectly absurd, she chided herself soundly. Just

because Ian and Constance were so outrageously happy, was that any reason to suppose that there weren't a million spinsters quite as contented? Lee considering herself a confirmed spinster at twenty would have amused any one but herself. At twenty one seems to have lived such a very long time.

Lee had been for some time now a spectator of other people's affairs with no one to share her own. She had no real place in Mrs. Plympton's household; her position there was not at all a natural one. She was a wistful onlooker at the merry, intimate doings of the Finley family. Without knowing what she lacked, she craved people of her own, to whom her affairs would be interesting; whose jokes, and allusions, and experiences were hers. Mamsy, perhaps. But Mamsy occurred to her, now, in another connection. There she was, as happy as a lark, with never a man at all. An excellent example of the contented spinster. That Mamsy *was* as happy as a lark, Lee never doubted for a moment. But it must be rather lonely in the white house, at that.

"I'll bang off a note and brighten the dear up a bit," said Lee kindly, getting out the typewriter without delay.

XI

That winter Mrs. Plympton made another find for her outer, or "interesting" circle.

"Such a wonderful, dear, oppressed woman," she told Lee over their coffee in the library. "A Russian. She's had the most frightful times, my dear, imprisoned for months with dying people. She walked barefoot across the whole of Russia, I gathered—I don't recollect what part—

with often nothing to eat. If you could only see her—such a pallid, intense face! She's a pianist, very talented. I'm planning to help her give some little recitals and gain a foothold."

"You're so kind," Lee murmured.

"It's one thing I can *not* tolerate," Mrs. Plympton proceeded. "Art unappreciated. That, I think, was one of the most beautiful features of the Italian Renaissance—the patronage of the arts."

"Is the lady coming here?" Lee inquired. "She sounds quite fascinating."

"She *is* fascinating. Koshka, Marya Koshka. Isn't there all the mystery and beauty of her country in the name? Yes, she is coming to my little Tuesday musicale. In fact, she is to be the artist."

With which Mrs. Plympton proceeded decorously to play solitaire. The previous winter she had several times regretted that Lee could not join her in games of cards and draughts, to which Lee had replied that she would be delighted to play if she might have the special sets which the Organization could furnish. Mrs. Plympton had never acted upon her suggestion, however, merely remarking, "I'm afraid I should win so often, my dear, that it would bore you." Lee, smiling somewhat, remembered nights at the white house when Anne, in mock fury, had upset the checker-board because Lee had beaten her twice in succession. She was given no chance to beat Mrs. Plympton, and sat unoccupied listening to the slight shuffle of the cards and the deep breathings of the good lady when she became deeply involved in the problems of Black on Red.

Once a week they went to the opera and sat in a parterre box toward which glasses were often directed when Lee ap-

peared. Mrs. Plympton had taken a whim for dressing her *à jeune fille,* and with a modestly cut frock of white panne velvet, and a small wreath of silver laurel leaves crowning her glinting coiled hair, she was quite compellingly beautiful. The opera made up completely for the other evenings of solitaire and somnolent converse. Mrs. Plympton apparently thought it unnecessary or impracticable to explain the scene or the action to Lee, but the music sufficed, and, sitting moveless in her corner of the box, Lee slipped into confessedly foolish dreams of a day when she would electrify audiences from that stage. She knew that opera must be for her a shut door, no matter what oppor-

Once a week they went to the opera.

tunities the concert stage might offer, yet she could not help flashing with Carmen, shouting with Brünnhilde, in imagination.

Madame Koshka was indeed the artist at Mrs. Plympton's next Tuesday. She stood—always somehow a little apart from those with whom she talked—a tall, narrow figure somberly swathed in dark velvet. The high collar of her dress, edged with fur and fastened with a beaten silver clasp, half framed her pointed face, the pallor of which was heightened by the application of a quantity of white powder. In the midst of this pale shape her lips moved like agitated scarlet threads, her long, gray-green eyes opened and shut rapidly. She played passionately and with vast volume of sound, what she called "the cry of the oppressed in my land," and sank effectively across the keyboard at the end. Lee did not understand the music, but was strangely chilled and fired by it. It was not until after Madame had been revived and congratulated that Lee met her.

"My little blind singer," Mrs. Plympton explained. (Lee was well used to this.) "She is studying with Gavanelli."

Madame Koshka clasped both Lee's hands in a grasp which seemed to her extraordinarily like magnetized ice, if such a thing could exist.

"Blind, you say? Ah, but the seeing heart, yes? She has that. I know these things."

Lee, who was unprepared for such a greeting, murmured something about the remarkable quality of the music she had just heard.

"I thank you that you hear it so. I play from the soul. You sing from the soul, yes? That is the only way. Any other way—bah!"

She made an unpleasantly grating sound and released Lee's hands in order to fling her own outward as if casting the "other ways" from her conclusively. Lee was not sure

whether or not she sang from the soul. Not Gavanelli's things, certainly. Mrs. Plympton at this point bore Madame Koshka off to other admirers, and Lee was left standing somewhat stranded beside the piano.

"Blind, you say? Ah—but the seeing heart!"

Madame became quite a regular feature of Mrs. Plympton's Tuesdays, and a few former favorites dropped off, temperamentally annoyed. Tuesday afternoons, however, were not the only times when the Russian was welcome. She dined frequently at the house, and lolled decoratively in the gold brocade chairs, a cigarette depending from her vivid mouth. On such occasions she would tell dramatic tales of capture and escape, past misery and present joy, to which Mrs. Plympton listened compassionately, and Lee with manifest excitement. Unfortunately Lee could not see the magnificent gestures of Madame as she leaned forward and clutched her muffled throat in poignant despair. But

she nevertheless enlivened tremendously Lee's unbroken routine of luxury, and, beside the interest of her actual presence, left behind her most alluring and sometimes disturbing thoughts.

This new friend was so extremely new that Lee had no standards by which to judge her, and hence made some to fit. Madame was so unlike any one Lee had ever before encountered that she stood out quite alone, representing Russia and Romance in a most sweeping manner.

Constance, who met her at Mrs. Plympton's, said, "Pooh! Don't let her fool you!" and Lee came nearer to having a tiff with Constance than she had ever had.

"But the things she's *done!*" Lee argued. "If you'd heard her tell about those hideous prisons, and the agony and all!"

"I can imagine how she tells it. Frozen fire, eh? I was in France the last year of the war, remember. I've heard tales *and* tales. One look at her sufficed me!"

"You see," said Lee, a little stiffly, "I am without the advantage of even one look."

"Lee Kelton, you amaze me!" said Constance. "I'm sure I everlastingly beg your pardon!" and she went off to tea with Ian and hated herself all afternoon and wouldn't butter his scone for him.

A pleasant element in the exciting new friendship was that Madame Koshka did not, apparently, pity Lee. All Mrs. Plympton's acquaintance, except the Finleys, pitied her so obviously and extravagantly that it was a relief indeed to sit listening to the Russian's vivid personalities, delivered with fire and fervor and no conscious readjustment of viewpoint or phraseology. The fact was that Madame was far

too much interested in her own experiences and mental processes to detach herself long enough for pity.

When Lee had first encountered manifest pity in Mrs. Plympton's world, she was undecided how to meet it. It both humiliated and incensed her. When she overheard the far from whispered comments of, "How terrible!" and "Poor girl!" she strove to look touchingly modest or proudly oblivious—and usually achieved a sort of smirk in either case. Mamsy would have groaned! Mamsy, of course, remained in a class by herself. She was just Mamsy, and if she ever felt pity, it was so deeply hidden by pride and so interlaced with love that it was of an altogether different order. Certainly it was not of the sort that leaps to the lips or diffuses itself from the embarrassment of the stranger.

But of late, startlingly, Lee had found—or thought she found—that she didn't care. Wherefore she overlaid any secret shreds of sensitiveness that remained, with the outward armor of a sort of flippant swagger that Anne would perhaps have liked as little as the smirk. It crept, somewhat, into her letters, which harped unnecessarily upon her own attainments. Anne recognized in it a need for self-encouragement and reassurance that seemed to her rather pitiful, and she longed to see the child, that she might scold and jolly her along a bit. But this she was given little opportunity to do. Her letters could not convey what she would have said beside the white house fire, and Lee's communications left her few loopholes. Lee was working, if not from her soul, as Madame Koshka recommended, certainly with her mind, and Gavanelli promised a début next season, perhaps hastened by Mrs. Plympton's substantial encouragements. In view of this, Gavanelli granted a summer of comparative rest before the intensive practice of

the autumn. Mrs. Plympton kept a firm hand upon her protégée, and Anne was again disappointed.

XII

The watering-places were not exactly restful. Even standing on the edge of the social whirlpool was rather exhausting. Lee was sometimes swept into the vortex, spun madly there for a short time, and then found herself again stranded outside. Mrs. Plympton strove to make up for the obvious snubbing by perfect avalanches of new clothes. Lee occasionally heard herself referred to as the best dressed girl on the beach. The remark was often followed by another: "But how terrible that she can't see!" Lee, consumed by an aching pride, swaggered, carried her independence beyond its limits, and succeeded in getting herself into a number of ludicrous, if not dangerous, situations.

Constance Finley was married in the middle of the summer, and Mrs. Plympton sent Lee in the car, with a maid, to the Connecticut town where the Finleys had lived for generations. She spent the night with them in the great, quiet, Colonial house that looked drowsily through old elms and hickories to a distant river bend beyond broad meadows. A number of other people were staying with the Finleys; the Inn was full of wedding guests. Lee had little chance for much talk with her friend. But Constance, in the midst of her own happiness and wonderment and busy last moments, found time to think about Lee. She saw plainly enough a change; excitement and the instinctive desire to impress new people had not improved Lee's sophisticated manner. Constance was at first annoyed, then very sorry.

"Poor lamb—what's happened?" she wondered, watching Lee engaging Ian's brother in conversation. "Have the riches gone to her head at last? No, she's on the defensive; she's not giving any one else a chance. For what, I wonder?"

For pity, perhaps, if Constance had known. Not giving any one a chance to think for a moment that she was less well-informed, less up-to-the-minute, less free-and-easy, less of the initiated than any one else. In other words, a bluff, a weapon against pity and patronage, a pose.

"But she's picked out the wrong pose," thought Constance again. "It's gallant enough, but—well, I wish she hadn't found need of a pattern just when the South Shore happened to be at hand." Aloud, she said: "I wish this were a real visit! This is such a scramble. You must come and stay and stay when Ian and I get our cave-dwelling in town."

"I'd adore to," said Lee in a tone which sounded as if she wouldn't. As a matter of fact she could think of nothing more jolly than to stay with them.

"I wish," said Constance with real regret, "oh, I wish I'd seen more of you last winter. I think it was stupid of me to run about so with Ian when I'm going to have him all my life." She looked anxiously at Lee and longed, as Anne had so often longed, to be able to exchange the deep regard of eye to eye that can say so much. "That helps to make her seem more indifferent than she really is," Constance reflected, "not meeting one's eye, quite."

Then she was called away to other problems more nearly touching her own life.

They were married, Constance and Ian, out of doors under the oldest elm. The great lawn, checkered with light

and shadow, was gently astir with many people. Ian's brother played the harp and Constance's brother his violin; above the music locusts buzzed in the meadow. There was a wind high up in elm leaves; Ian's voice was deep and

In the midst of it, Constance slipping up to kiss Lee.

moving; Constance's low and clear and full of faith and beauty. Lee wanted to cry. Instead, she adjusted her extremely smart hat at a jauntier angle.

Then it was over, and there were things to eat and a stir

of talk, and in the midst of it Constance slipping up to kiss Lee good-by.

"And you *will* come and visit us? This isn't going to make any difference, you know, this man of mine. Come and swap ballads!"

"I'd adore to," said Lee.

Then presently there was laughing, and a general cry of, "There they go! Good luck! Good-by!" They were gone in a whirl of petals gathered painstakingly from the fading rose garden by Ian's little nephew. They were gone to begin a walking trip through the mountains. By that night they would be alone with hemlocks, and the evening star, and each other.

Lee stood beside a tree—a very charming picture—but stranded in totally unfamiliar surroundings. It was Mrs. Finley herself who remembered and rescued her finally, and saw her safely turned over to Snider and the maid, who had been feasting on left-overs with the caterer's men.

Lee arrived at Mrs. Plympton's too late for dinner, and ate alone in the still dining-room, with Howard, the second-man, officiating so noiselessly that she started every time he announced a dish by saying, "Hem, Miss," at her very ear. Afterward Mrs. Plympton wanted to hear all about the wedding.

"Oh," said Lee, "I suppose it was very much like all weddings."

As a matter of fact, it had been rather different from many; but it was the only one Lee had ever attended. She excused herself quite soon, and went to bed because there was nothing else to do. It was still early, and she lay awake long, thinking of wind in elm trees, of the deep low thrill in Ian's shy voice saying, "I do;" of her newest hat, on

which she had heard several favorable comments. She fell then to pondering on a curious thing. Most of these people at Constance's wedding had not known that she could not see, and much as she disliked the pity of people who did know, she liked no better what she felt to be a lack of consideration on the part of those who didn't. She was left standing under trees, lost; she had a hard time capturing anything to eat; she felt herself neglected. A curious anomaly, if she had pondered a little more deeply! A person who professed herself furious at a well-meaning hand offered to escort her, yet who felt herself slighted and ill-used if left to her own resources! She was unable to stand far enough away from herself to see that all this was quite a new phase. Where was the candid and independent Lee who had often made even Mamsy's seasoned heart stand still with her daring? The truth of the matter was that she had been so ceaselessly pampered and pursued by the ministrations of Mrs. Plympton and her servitors that there had been forced upon her the dependence of the spoiled rich girl, to intensify the already present dependence of the blind. The combination swamped and bewildered Lee herself, who at times recovered her senses enough to wonder what was the matter with her.

She fell asleep before she reached this point to-night, however, and dreamed, oddly enough, of Mamsy, to whom she had not written for at least three weeks.

XIII

Anne was at last allowed a peep at her child toward the end of the summer. Mrs. Plympton, perhaps thinking it only fair to a seemingly worthy and devoted

guardian, perhaps tiring of the constant social problems that persisted in rising at the summer resort, packed Lee home for a few weeks. She shipped her under the care of the squeaky maid, and Lee was torn between a desire to astound Mamsy by stepping off the train unattended, a competent traveler, or equally to impress her with the smart maid carrying the bags. Anne met her at the station in an ill-disguised fever of expectancy. They had not seen each other for nearly two years; not since Anne had put Lee and the old sole leather bag into Mrs. Plympton's limousine.

"Anne! How soul-satisfying!" (Lee had lately taken to writing "Anne" not "Mamsy," but the spoken word nevertheless came as a distinct shock.)

"You don't mind walking?"

Rather in contradiction of the airy greeting, Lee bestowed on Mamsy the fervent hug of a ten-year-old, which turned in the middle into a very gracious and circumspect embrace. This over, and the maid left to wait for the down

train, Anne picked up the expensive fitted bag with L. K. goldenly stamped upon it. Lee made no attempt to carry it herself, and Anne didn't want to leave it perched on the platform.

Little Ned Stiles was obviously smitten.

"You don't mind walking? I can get a jit if you do."

"Oh, no," said Lee doubtfully. She had no objection at all to walking, but she subconsciously wanted to give Anne a subtle reminder of the motors to which she was accustomed. Anne apparently got the desired impression.

"I don't believe you're so keen about Steeplejack Hill as you were," she said a little wistfully. "I'm afraid you've developed limousine legs."

Lee laughed and altered her step to fit Anne's stride. She was wearing a beautifully tailored Shantung suit and a maize-colored hat and looked remarkably unrumpled for a traveler. Then Anne remembered that she had come up by parlor car.

Lee seemed to prefer going over to the community tennis courts rather than staying in the cooler garden of the white house. Anne could not imagine that she got any satisfaction out of hearing the twang of ball on racquet and the meaningless jargon of "forty-fif" and "vantage out;" she wondered ruefully if the satisfaction came from wearing better clothes and a greater variety of them than any one else at the courts. Little Ned Stiles, who was almost grown up, was quite obviously smitten, and Angela Morton quite as obviously jealous. It sickened Anne completely, and she dragged Lee back from the club on pretext of a sun headache.

Anne was bewildered. Living alone with memories of Lee, she always expected to see her again exactly as she had seen her last. Just as she had absurdly felt that she must find at Willburg the eager seven-year-old she had left there, so she now had expected to return to her the frank and simple girl of two years before. She had hoped that the sojourn with Mrs. Plympton would give Lee, beside the musical opportunity, poise and confidence. It seemed to have given her more pose than poise.

The visit was quite disturbing and distressing to them both. Lee appeared each day in a different dainty costume. Though she made no mention of breakfast in bed, she yawned discreetly so often during eight o'clock meals on the little brick side piazza that Anne felt possibly it had been expected. Therefore Anne was the more astonished to behold her enigmatic child up and out in the garden one morning at half-past six o'clock, poking her fingers into the lupin dew-cups like the little Lee who once had loved to do that. At seven-thirty she was stealthily back in her room and apparently expecting Anne to call her.

There she was, trying to impress Anne with magnificence again. She couldn't really make up her own mind whether she liked the magnificence or not, but she certainly intended to give Mamsy the full benefit of her two years' experience. She did it rather like the rehearsal for a play, but Mamsy didn't always applaud in the right places.

"You haven't sung to me yet at all, dearest," Anne said hopefully, when almost half the visit was gone. "Does Gavanelli forbid promiscuous warbling, or don't you think I'm worthy?"

"Anne!" Lee was reproachful. "I'd sing for you with my dying breath!"

Anne wondered if she would. Lee made her way to the piano and scampered bombastically up and down its keys till the poor old thing jangled in surprise.

"Dear silly old piano!" Lee commented. "I forgot its limitations." (Mrs. Plympton had a Steinway grand.)

Then Lee cleared her throat and leaped straightway into the intricacies of Aminta's air from *Il Re Pastore*. It was an aria for which Anne had never cared, and she found herself tense with the effort of anticipating Lee's high notes, which she did not take easily. The accompaniment, which Lee knew only by ear, was beyond her skill as a pianist and she made a hash of it.

"Most grand!" Anne said, clapping faintly from the window seat. "But isn't it too high for you? I thought it was a soprano aria."

"Mezzo," Lee explained, turning around on the piano stool. "Gavanelli's been trying to get my voice up a little."

"I wish he'd let it be! Your low notes are infinitely lovelier than your high ones."

"I suppose you'd rather hear one of the old things," said Lee, somewhat condescendingly.

"I believe I should," Anne agreed.

So Lee sang *The Wraggle Taggle Gypsies,* of which she had surprisingly forgotten some of the words, substituting airy tra-las. Gone was the fire, gone the gayety, the inimitable quality with which she had always sung the ballad. She placed each of its simple notes with technical surety in a voice of expressionless power.

"Dear me," said Anne, "you used to really convince me that the lady preferred the cold open field and the gypsies, but now I believe she had a hankering after the gold and the goose-feather bed after all. Such is luxury. You mustn't forget the old things, dearest. In some ways they're so much more fun than the gymnastics." She rose to light candles on the mantel. "Don't believe everything Gavanelli tells you, Lee."

During the visit Anne painted a new portrait of Lee, arrayed in her simplest gown. In so doing she learned several other things beside a new trick of high-light. One cannot gaze searchingly into a face an hour or two a day without its revealing a little of the thought within. To begin with, Lee looked tired, physically and spiritually. Secondly, she looked defiant. But, relaxed and dreamy in the quiet of the studio, little fears and whimsies and doubts and hopes and amusements crept out and stole across her face. Sometimes Anne's brush lay idle far longer than Lee knew.

"She needs something," thought Anne. She was too anxious and too detached to say, "She needs me." Anne wondered if she might safely speak her heart in the intimate stillness before the last fire embers, the bedtime hour that

had once been marked by confessions and confidences and tenderness. Anne yearned toward her, and Lee, well enough aware that she merited a lecture, apprehensively blocked every beginning and gave Anne no chance at all. She had begun everything wrongly, with her first insincere, breezy greeting on the platform, and with mistaken pride and a doubting defiance she carried her pose through, excitedly.

So the visit came to its end. Lee had succeeded in dazzling the community with her wardrobe and impressing them by her manner. She had shown a singular ineptitude in getting about the once familiar rooms of the white house, and had apparently come to depend to a shocking degree on the ministrations of the squeaky maid. This personage being absent, Lee had sought out Anne with girdles to be tied and collars to be adjusted. "So dull of me; my maid spoils me, I'm afraid." Her apology sounded something like a boast. Anne, on these frequent occasions, had been struck silent by a clearly remembered image of a solemn four-year-old who grasped a button with both hands while she turned round and round in the vigor of her pursuit of an elusive button-hole, muttering the while: *"Mus'* hurry yup else de brepfus will be cold!" Many such images rushed back upon Anne. Sometimes she wished heartily that the fateful operetta at the Organization had never been sung.

> "Now runs my cup of joy so brimming o'er,
> Thankless were I to ask one blessing more!"

So had sung the eager Prince Charmion—believed it, too. The dubious blessing of wealth had so flooded the cup that Anne feared all might now be spilled and spoiled.

It was over, the longed-for visit. Anne returned from

the station and went up slowly to put to rights the little blue bedroom that had always been Lee's. A faint perfume of Houbigant's Violette lingered there. It was no more sweetly elusive than Lee had been during those curious, baffling weeks. She had been on her guard from first to last, so far as Anne could see. Afraid of what? That Anne should think her unsuccessful? Uninitiated in the ways of luxury? Absurdly young? What? Was she showing off, and if so, what did she really think she had to show, except some outrageously expensive clothes? By her manner she purported to be above blindness, yet she had come to Anne for help she would not have dreamed of accepting two years ago. She had laughed at Anne's well-meaning philosophies and called her "darlingly unprogressive" when she voiced them.

Anne stood beside the unmade bed holding the woven cathedral window spread, and forgot how long she stood. How could she know that Lee, in her parlor car chair, sat tense and choked with unshed tears, trying to analyze her disappointment in the anticipated visit, and longing to sob out on Mamsy's shoulder the whole of a proudly hidden burden of young loneliness and bewilderment.

XIV

Madame Koshka was first among Mrs. Plympton's friends to welcome Lee back to town in the early fall. In fact she gave a studio tea for her, at which there assembled a collection of rare spirits whose whirling circle did not even overlap the edge of Mrs. Plympton's. Isabel Nutting, who wrote jagged poetry; Baldric, who was working on a new theory of ambient spheres in art; Leroy Nome, talking to everybody

who would listen about himself in relation to the universe; Stepan Krysa, the composer of Russian dissonances in lyric form.

"Stepan," Madame Koshka said, "it is I who am to be her accompanist, yes! Do you not see us doing immense things?" Madame's gesture was immense. "The début, it is promised this season. *Nous sommes en forte bonne voie.* Stepan, she shall sing your songs, si?"

Stepan Krysa agreed that she must sing his songs. He put one foot on the piano bench and, humping himself over the keyboard, played in a standing position some sinuous discords, and sang a few bars in a thin, mysterious tenor. Lee thought the music sounded very difficult and not very beautiful, but she was caught by the idea of singing manuscript works for the public. Madame Koshka played like a descending torrent of floods released, and her friends groaned in joy and sympathy. Lee consumed tea from a glass, and burned her hand against the samovar which she encountered unexpectedly.

She related such parts of the entertainment as she thought Mrs. Plympton would appreciate, when Madame had returned with her in a taxi to the great house, and Mrs. Plympton agreed that Madame was an intense and stimulating personality. In proposing her for Lee's accompanist, the good lady was killing two birds with one charity, and she was well satisfied with her judgment and her accomplishment.

Mrs. Plympton's purse paved the way to a début at Æolian Hall; nothing less ambitious would satisfy her ideas of propriety. She also saw to a certain amount of publicity, and modest posters bearing an excellent photographic likeness of the artist and the words, "Lee Kelton, Contralto,"

with the date of the recital, adorned the billboards outside. Lee mailed one of the posters to Anne, who put it up in the studio with thumbtacks and sat staring at it while her brush lay idle. "Lee Kelton, Contralto." The little Lee who still in memory sang quaint tunes about the quiet white house.

Anne was extremely busy with the first big commercial order she had worked on, and could come to New York for only the great event itself. Lee wrote apologetically that it certainly seemed as though there ought to be room enough in Mrs. Plympton's four stories for the artist's nearest friend, but no such suggestion had been made and Anne reserved a room at the Martha Washington. Her train was late, as trains out of New England always are, and she dashed from Grand Central to Æolian Hall without time to see Lee in the greenroom before the recital. She had scarcely time, indeed, to gain her seat across the knees of several people whose politely hostile looks protested against her plunging haste. She found, as she sank back and tried to unfold her program, that her knees were ridiculously expressive of her state of mind, and hoped that Lee's were steadier. She looked about. The hall was fairly well filled. She saw a newspaper critic whose face she recognized, sunk in bored anticipation of the début of another mediocrity. But the rustling and settling began to die. There was a guarded clapping which became louder, some whispers of admiration, and not a few clucks of pity. "How she'll hate that!" thought Anne fiercely, not knowing that the hard look Lee's face habitually wore of late was the outward expression of a dearly bought defense against pity.

But Anne turned now, gripping the chair arms, to look at the stage. Lee had already left the entrance, and with

one hand ever so lightly on her accompanist's arm was advancing to the middle of the platform. She wore a gown of heavy jade green crêpe with silver tissue caught away at the sleeves and girdle by bands of dull metallic brocade. Anne recognized in it no trace of Mrs. Plympton's taste. It had been chosen by Madame Koshka. That lady Anne scarcely noted; all her gaze was for Lee, and she was almost unaware of the lithe, dark figure quivering above the piano.

Lee stood alone facing her audience. She looked rather remote and complacent, and not at all afraid, though her usual color was lacking. Her eyes swept the audience as she graciously inclined her smooth chestnut head and flung out her hands in deprecation of the applause. The unseeing gray gaze for an instant almost met Anne's, and Anne, rigid and passionate, breathed over and over:

"Do you know I'm looking at you? Do you know I'm loving you?"

Then the accompanist struck the first notes of Delilah's *Song of Spring,* and Lee folded her hands and sang. Anne, in the fourth row, wondered if the students in the balcony could hear, if the clear, lovely contralto was carrying beyond the newspaper critic, who still looked bored. Anne feared that it did not; then she forgot her fear under the spell of Lee herself; of, perhaps, the memory of a baby standing beneath a tree of falling petals singing in a small amused alto a solemn ditty about a frog. It did not matter who else could hear Lee; she was singing for Anne, for Mamsy. But was she? Anne's senses were roused by the not very satisfactory handling of the range in the aria. Apparently Gavanelli had not succeeded in getting Lee's voice up, after all; her leap at her high note came perilously near being

flat. She recovered herself with a rich, delicious run of lower tones. *"Mon cœur désolé,"* she caroled.

"Why doesn't she *sing* it then as if her heart had been broken?" Anne demanded silently. "She hasn't changed the expression of her face or her voice from first to last."

She woke to cold consciousness of the softly creaking audience behind her; the hundreds of faintly glittering eyes that were all fixed on Lee. All those eyes fastened on the only person in the hall who could not return their various stares. It struck Anne with a curious sense of injustice. And the comments within her radius concerned themselves very little with the singing.

"Do you think she really can be?"

"She certainly doesn't look it, does she?"

"Yes, did you see how she had hold of the pianist when she came in?"

"Isn't it a lovely gown!"

That didn't argue too well for continued success. The blindness would be a nine days' wonder.

The program was not at all one that Anne would have chosen. Gavanelli had frowned upon Stepan and his manuscript, and he and Madame Koshka put aside their plans until Lee should be free of the maestro's control. She did her best with a stupid aria from *Rinaldo,* and triumphed in the swift, low passages of the *Divinités du Styx.* Anne brightened when she gave the lovely *J'ai perdu mon Eurydice* with more feeling than she had yet shown, but Madame Koshka became excited and drowned her out in places.

"Oh, but the pity, the pity!" Anne mourned. "What are they trying to make of her? All the time, the money, the heartbreak . . . Can't they see—can't they hear?"

Gavanelli, far to the side in the sixth row, did look a little

perturbed, but Mrs. Plympton's most recent check still made a pleasant warmth in his vest pocket.

There were a few bouquets, among them the sheaf of moon-roses Anne had hastily ordered at the Terminal Florist Shop, and Lee stood brave and beautiful during the applause which continued just long enough to be polite. Anne squeezed past people who were leisurely buttoning coats,

Lee greeted Anne with formal charm.

and fled to the greenroom, leaving behind her a faint trail of comment on "these commuters—they ought to be segregated or suppressed!" There were very few people in the greenroom. Mrs. Plympton, Gavanelli, a reporter, and Constance and Ian, whom Lee had not seen since the wedding. Lee greeted Anne with formal charm; the reporter was looking on.

"You *did* get here, then. Were you in time?"

It was quite a new sensation to Anne, being graciously re-

ceived by a singer in the artists' room of a noted concert hall; specially when the singer had once sat—and not so long ago, it seemed to Anne—upon her knee in the twilight, diverting them both with nursery ditties.

Lee had the grace to excuse herself from all other engagements and dine with Anne alone. They had dinner at the Brevoort, and the combination of Lee's beauty and her sometimes evident blindness won them many guarded looks.

"What did you *truly* think?" Lee demanded. Anne had showered compliments dealing mostly with demeanor and appearance all the way down in the bus.

"I *truly* think Gavanelli has made a mistake in trying to turn you into that kind of a person."

"But what other sort of person is there, so far as singing goes?"

"The kind you were before you were trained," Anne said.

"Anne, you are too adorably unprogressive!"

"Well, what happens next?" Anne wanted to know.

"I'm not sure. Of course Mrs. Plympton can't go on handing out Æolian to me. I suppose I sit down and wait—and it's the cue for managers to come and grovel."

"What if they don't?"

"Madame Koshka has an idea we might make a stir—if Gavanelli will let go—with some modern stuff. She has a lot of interesting composers and such on tap, and of course they're keen to get their stuff before the public in manuscript. We'd be accomplishing two or three things at once."

"Madame Koshka—she was your accompanist?"

"Yes; I'm so sorry you didn't meet her; she had to leave at once. She was exhausted. She's a wonderful creature, and she's had a desperate time escaping from Communists

and what not in Russia. She just pours out all her grief for her country in her music."

"I'm sorry not to have met her. I scarcely looked at her, there on the stage, I was so taken up with you, I suppose. By the way," Anne added, "where is it you're going to sit around and wait for said groveling managers? Have you become a fixture at Mrs. Plympton's? How long is her lease on you supposed to be, anyway?"

"I've really no idea," said Lee. "She hasn't said anything. I dare say I ought to assume, now I'm launched, that I can take care of myself."

"Can you?" said Anne.

"What I'd really like to do," Lee declared, "would be to get a little apartment with some congenial spirit."

Apparently Anne didn't occur to her as a candidate for the position. She was too securely woven into a background of the white house to be expected to emerge. Besides, she was just Mamsy—a very old story.

"H'm!" said Anne, not knowing whether to be amused or annoyed. "Quite an establishment it would be, I imagine! Speaking of congenial spirits, I liked your Constance and Ian so much."

"They're not *my* Constance and Ian, especially," said Lee. "But they're an awfully good sort. I used to be so fond of Con. But I hardly ever see her now. That's the worst of these people who go and get married. They're so absorbed in tacking up Japanese prints and building bookcases all over their little place that they only emerge for something really stupendous—like my recital."

"Well, I liked them; keep in touch with them if you can. I should think they'd be rather a pleasant safety valve when the pressure at Mrs. Plympton's gets too high."

"Oh, I have a lot of other friends," said Lee. She was thinking of Madame Koshka and her satellites.

XV

The managers didn't grovel. The newspaper man's critique was as bored as his attitude had been. Lee adopted perforce her waiting policy, and Mrs. Plympton, who really knew very little about music, berated Gavanelli. The good lady's manner toward Lee became even more dictatorial than usual, and she was more often consigned to the company of the Brussels griffon. But she was not, now, without a weapon against boredom. On such occasions she often telephoned, not Constance, but Madame Koshka, who was always glad to take her to tea at the studio.

On a late afternoon shortly after Lee's unspectacular entrance into the ranks of the professionals, the melancholy butler of the Plympton mansion sought her out in her room.

"A young man is below, Miss," he stated, "insisting to see you. I endeavored to prevail on him to depart, Miss, but he is obdurate. Mrs. Plympton is not in, Miss, so that I am unable to refer the matter to her judgment."

Carter's stately periods always annoyed Lee intensely. She sat up testily.

"Why should you send him away if he wants to see me?" she said, trying to make it seem an everyday occurrence to have young men insisting upon seeing her.

"He is—er—not a person with whom you would wish to associate, Miss, I imagine."

Thoroughly curious, Lee jumped up from the chaise longue.

"Of course I'll go down. And, Carter, you need *not* lift

me bodily off the floor. I'm quite able to walk, thank you."

In the dim, polished hallway a young man stood uneasily in an attitude of poised flight, sharply watched by the small eyes of Howard. The young man was perhaps twenty-two. His lean, square frame was somewhat inadequately covered by a hickory shirt and a suit of rough, warm linsey-woolsey, and he turned a very ancient felt hat between his hands. He showed signs of having been recently washed—partially—and brushed, but a penetrating odor of the stables clung to him. It was this and his quite audible gulps of apprehension, that first made Lee aware of his presence. Carter allied himself with Howard, and while the footman watched the visitor, the butler watched Lee. So the four stood in the hallway.

"You wanted to see me?" Lee asked coolly.

"Yes, ma'am," the young man articulated after two attempts.

"What about?"

"Air you Lee Kelton, for sure?" The words came almost defiantly.

Lee bit her lip, trying apprehensively to remember where she had once heard a voice with the same slow, harsh intonation.

"I am Lee Kelton," she returned after an instant. He was perhaps staring at her in the moment of silence that followed.

"I allow you air," he said, as though he had found something in her face that satisfied him. "I am Sid Kelton, yore brother."

There came drowning her, like an unwelcome dream, the memory of the hot, close parlor at Willburg, the strangeness of a man who had said he was her father, the silence

of a boy who had shrunk from her touch. Carter made a menacing step forward, and Lee wheeled to him.

"Show us into the little reception room, Carter," she said quickly. "No, I must talk to this young man. And please leave us alone."

But Carter hovered without the cut velvet portières. Sid would not sit down on any of the pale rose silk chairs. He stood erect, squeezing his hat.

"How am I to know you are my brother?" Lee asked him faintly, her haughtiness gone down before her sick shame and terror.

"I am Sid Kelton," he repeated, swallowing hard, "but I

"Air you Lee Kelton, for sure?"

allow you couldn't noways believe it, partickler with you thout'n sight."

"How did you get here, how *could* you?"

"I come with hosses," Sid explained. "I been workin' late

in the Blue Grass. I allus kindly follered lovin' hosses. They was a car-full sending to the North. They sent me to keer for 'em on the way."

There was a tremor of pride in his young, troubled voice at the dignity of his position. He had climbed far from John Henry's shiftless state on the mountain.

"But how did you know where to find me?"

"I had no ways to know. But I seed yore name on a house wall I passed, and spelled out the reading thar. I couldn't rightly believe 'twas you. But I asked 'em inside, and they allowed you follered singin', and tolt me how I could fotch to find you."

"And you found me. What do you want, now that you have found me?"

He was inarticulate. Presently he achieved:

"I allowed it would be a pure pleasure to see my kin."

Lee was swiftly touched despite herself. But another motive became apparent now. Sid's eyes had not ceased to pass in stupefied appraisal from one to another object in the small pink and gold room.

"I aim to ask if you could spare some money to us," he said thickly. "Paw is ailin'. He pines and pindles. I fotched him off the mountain, and I allow he kindly pines in the level land. We need it bad."

"I have no money," Lee protested. "Do you think this house is *mine?* It belongs to a kind lady who has done a great deal to help me. I'm just getting started; I haven't anything yet of my own."

That was naturally impossible for Sid to believe, gazing about him. His face darkened to think that his kin should deceive him. He stepped nearer.

The shadow of the Lancia limousine dimmed the outer

glass door. Mrs. Plympton entered impressively, and, hearing voices in the reception room, thrust aside the portières.

"Who," she demanded, "is this—person?"

Lee was stricken silent. She put out her hands helplessly.

"I am Sid Kelton," the young man said once more. "Her brother."

Indeed it was impossible not to see in his straight brow and curiously cut mouth more than a hint of Lee. Mrs. Plympton looked swiftly between them and put Lee aside.

"Go upstairs, child," she commanded. "I will talk to this person."

Lee was thankful to escape, utterly. Yet she somehow resented the scorn in her patron's voice. Sid was right; he *was* her kin. Through her humiliation, an agonizing loyalty suffused her against her will and dragged her to him. In her departure, she found his big hand and laid for an instant her own upon it. Once—it was twenty years ago—he had toddled to her soap-box cradle and dangled bright blowing grasses to delight unseeing eyes. She did not know that, but he was her blood brother.

"I'm sorry, Sid," she told him faintly.

"Go!" Mrs. Plympton commanded.

She went, and lost herself in a numb misery of tears. Mrs. Plympton creaked to her room later and found her still lying across the orchid silk coverlet of her bed, in the dark. The darkness made matters seem more dismal, but the good lady could never understand that it made no difference for Lee. She promptly switched on the light.

"Come, come, child, don't make yourself ugly crying. He won't trouble you again. Money was what he wanted. I have attended to that. He will leave for the South to-

morrow. But it is unfortunate, oh, terribly unfortunate. I suppose Carter heard everything."

"You bought him off!" Lee cried out. "That's hideous!"

"Carter can be trusted," Mrs. Plympton mused, "but Howard—was Howard present, Lee?"

"Oh," Lee said, "I don't think I can talk now."

Mrs. Plympton sighed and left her. She was herself considerably shaken. She had always consciously avoided entering into any personal relations with Anne, whom she considered worthy, but bourgeois. The sudden appearance of this incredibly impossible creature had shocked her more than she confessed even to herself.

Lee made absolutely no mention of the episode in writing to Anne. Mrs. Plympton did, however, in a crested and crackling missive—the first she had deigned to send Anne. In it she stated her procedure in the matter, and with scant courtesy intimated that she held Anne culpable for not having made clear to her the exact nature of Lee's antecedents. "It might," she wrote, "have made a difference." Anne replied that she had forgotten that others might be swayed by a fact which had never made any difference to her. And she read and re-read Lee's brief and reserved letters, her heart bursting with the advice and consolation she was given no opportunity to extend.

How much the appearance of Sid Kelton and the manifest lack of sensation caused by Lee's début had to do with Mrs. Plympton's sudden interest in the Near East is not easy to determine. Interested she became, however, to such a degree that it was necessary for her to go and superintend the care of some of the dear, dear creatures from the safe and not very relevant headquarters of Amalfi.

"I don't know just what to do with you, my dear," she confessed to Lee. "I can't leave you in the house very well, and it's unlikely that your Ramsey woman would consider coming to town. And in town you must stay, child, to follow up your opportunities."

The problem, which was not presented to Anne till after its solution, was solved by Madame Koshka. That oppressed woman found the loneliness of her studio unbearable. She touched in her young friend chords of vibration similar to her own, which moved her deeply. She needed her, in fact, as soul-stimulus; they could work out together a program, not only for music, but for existence, for mutual growth.

Lee kindled to the idea; her brief tastes of the studio had been stimulating and alluring. The life among Mrs. Plympton's ornate furniture and ubiquitous servants had become an imprisonment only tolerated out of gratitude and sense of duty. Mrs. Plympton sent to Anne Madame's credentials, which were impressive. Lee wrote her several fervid and atrociously typed pages begging her to sign what she called "my pardon," and elaborating on the fascination and ability of this congenial spirit.

Anne, pondering the matter before the fireplace where she had thought over so many of Lee's problems, decided that almost anything which would release Lee from this life of alternate spoiling and snubbing would be a good thing, and wrote sanctioning the arrangement.

"Good luck!" she wrote Lee. "But don't accept indiscriminately. Ideas, I mean, above all. Sometimes it's so easy, you know, to gulp down an idea whole without examining it—like a puppy-dog bolting a bar of soap—and regretting it afterward. The freedom will seem absolute after Mrs.

Plympton's ménage. Remember that the truest freedom is that which recognizes that fetters exist."

"Dear old Anne!" Lee smiled, when her fingers had assimilated this.

So Mrs. Plympton, her maid, and the Brussels griffon, sailed on the *Majestic* for Cherbourg, leaving her protégée—if she could still be so called—with a generous supply of pocket money and a spirit that sang in the suddenly opened spaces of liberty.

FIFTH VERSE

Mud and Clay Will Wash Away

I

LEE found her wardrobe much too extensive to fit into the very limited storage space of the studio apartment. She hunted up Vonya, of whom she had not thought for years, and bestowed upon her the most useful discards. Vonya was still working at a loom in the Organization. She became transfigured at meeting Lee again.

"You know," she said, "I heard you sing at Æolian Hall one time this fall. A lady sent tickets to some of us girls. Oh, it was grand! I was so proud! I meant to write to you, but I didn't know where you lived. I've never forgotten how you sung that Prince. And your lovely friend, Miss Ramsey!"

Lee felt guilty, and murmured that they must certainly try to keep in touch. Vonya said that it would be just lovely. Then Lee promptly and purposely forgot Vonya again.

The studio ménage was a delight to Lee after the stilted luxury of Mrs. Plympton's establishment. Here at last was Life! How young she had been to think she knew Bohemia during the months in New York when she and Anne had lived in two furnished rooms! These people who surrounded Madame Koshka did extraordinarily vivid things and reveled in the doing of them. A changing group almost continuously filled the supposedly lonely studio. Not only at tea-time; it was quite common for Stepan Krysa to be found

sitting at the piano in the morning, while Madame, in a pewter-gray chiffon negligee, brewed coffee in a small-waisted brass pot.

"Stepan, you will ruin your mechanism!"

"*Dastatachna lee krepak kofe?* Is it strong *now* enough? Stepan, you will ruin your mechanism eventually. *Tiens!* See, little one, can you find us the cups?"

Lee, flattered, would fetch them, while Stepan eyed her broodingly and struck careless bass chords at random with one hand. He was a man of nearly forty, heavy and tall, with a sheaf of dust-brown hair thrust away from his high, slanting forehead, and eyes singularly sullen and unindicative of the fire that lay behind. Lee knew only his voice, which was oddly light and thin for his great body, and which clipped words in a high, rapid monotone. She imaged him as slight, almost negligible, in physique.

No chance for solitude, boredom, now! The days pulsed to a new rhythm—or so Isabel Nutting put it. Madame

Koshka played endless torrents of fierce, exciting music. She would break off in the middle of a bar to voice in her low, mystic tone some idea of life or beauty or power that had just been vouchsafed her. And they worked. Stepan Krysa explained his songs; he sang them again and again in French, in Russian, till Lee could flash out with their strange intervals. They taxed her range and power to the fullest extent; sometimes Stepan cursed her for a fool and a weakling who would destroy his works with her stupidity.

Often he would stay till late at the studio, drinking glass after glass of strong tea as he walked about the room, smoking innumerable cigarettes. He cried out corrections in Russian to Madame Koshka at the piano, criticized Lee in peevish outbursts. Lee wished he would sit down or stand still; it made her nervous to have his criticisms delivered each time from a different part of the room. Frequently Isabel Nutting would be there, too, smoking, with her large feet up on the edge of the table. She could make poetry even while the practicing was going on; indeed, she said she got moments of meaning from it that were very stimulating to her own reactions. Leroy Nome liked to lie on the floor in front of the grate and draw circles on the rug. The placing of the circle was very important, for it demonstrated man's place in infinity. He tried to explain it to Lee, but as he was unable to make himself clear without visible illustration, her ideas on the subject remained hazy. Perhaps not very much hazier than Mr. Nome's.

There were other musicians who strayed in from time to time: a young Pole who played the violin really beautifully, a Bohemian lady with a piercing soprano voice, Nils Harfven with his 'cello. Sometimes they had instrumental trios and poured out strange, new Slavic compositions, or their

own half-finished works. Lee often wished they would play Beethoven, or Bach, or Chopin, but dared not say so. Stepan would have grunted, "Aie! Penny tunes!"

And just as Lee had said of the South Shore parties, "They must be fun or all these people wouldn't enjoy them," so she thought now, "There must be truth and beauty in this music, somewhere, or these people wouldn't be moved and excited by it."

When she found herself beginning to be moved and excited by it she thought she was gaining an appreciation of veiled beauty, not a toleration of decadence.

II

"*Voyons,* little one," Madame Koshka said musingly above their luncheon one day when she and Lee were alone. "I shall be so glad, so, so happy, when the taffetas of Madame Plympton are no more. She would fit you to a pattern; you have no pattern, Liosha." This was Madame's diminutive for her young friend's name.

"Haven't I?" Lee said, balancing her plate of tinned sardines on top of a pile of pallid paper-backed books.

"No, no," Madame assured her, with one of the gestures she never could deny herself, though Lee could not appreciate them. "No, not a pattern. You are too intangible, your vibrations are too volatile that you should ever be forced into a pattern. Nothing that is immense and beautiful can be made into a pattern."

"Am I beautiful?" said Lee, somewhat shamefaced, asking a question she had never before asked of any one.

Madame detached her attention from the sardines and gazed long and piercingly at Lee.

"My God, yes, you are beautiful!" she said.

Lee laughed nervously, and, in reaching for another roll, knocked the chocolate pot over.

"Oh, how ghastly stupid!" she babbled, seeking to discover the amount of damage with trembling fingers.

"My God, yes, you are beautiful!"

"Neechevo!" Madame reassured her. "It is nothing; not even a drop on the ancient rug, *ma pauvre petite*. But, ah!" she cried in sudden triumph, "see, see! A devastating trail upon the taffeta of Madame Plympton! At the least, one is disposed of!"

Thus pricked and abetted by Madame, Lee abandoned a great many perfectly good clothes and spent entirely too much money on several gowns of Madame's choosing.

"Ah, we shall have to sing for this!" Madame said. "But who can resist? Tangerine velvet, Liosha, with a silver ceinture! If you could know what it makes happen!"

Lee did know, a little, what it made happen. It gave her confidence. Mrs. Plympton's utra-fashionable and expensive clothes had given her confidence in a world of fashion and expensiveness. Here they were a misfit. These strange and sinuous garments—strange even to the touch—made her curiously one with the people whom Madame Koshka gathered about her.

Every one of these people had some theory, some belief, some reaction; spiritual, artistic, psychic, scientific. Each rode a capering hobby, confident that he straddled Pegasus. The musicians not merely sang or played but had a deep and exciting motive for so doing. Lee felt she was a bit slow and behind the times to have nothing to exhibit but a fair technique. Fortified by her new and arresting raiment, she set about evolving a pet theory of her own. "Something they won't know anything about," she thought. "Something distinctive, and all mine. What do I really believe, anyhow?"

That was a question not to be easily answered. However, she marshaled her beliefs, even some which had been for long in hiding, and found them too tame to present to her new friends. She sent them all back carefully to the inmost recesses of her spirit and proceeded to manufacture something novel. Boldly turning her blindness to account, she invented a mystic theory of tangible vibrations and color shapes that meant absolutely nothing and was so specious that Lee began half believing in it herself.

The first time she voiced it from behind an alluring veil

of blue cigarette smoke she felt extremely silly, but to her surprise it met with keen interest and a volley of comment and argument. The more she talked, in a random jargon and a low, moving voice, the more excellent and exciting did her plausible theory become. Secure in the knowledge that none of them could possibly verify her sensations in a world of darkness, she embroidered her thesis at will and rose immeasurably in the estimation of the intense group that frequented the studio.

She had risen so in her own estimation that when Constance asked her to tea in the "cave-dwelling," Lee could not forbear airing the main gist of her theory.

"That *sounds* like perfect bosh, Lee," said Constance. "Of course, if it could be true it would be revolutionary, stupendous. But it can't be! If it is—oh, what color is this teapot, for instance?"

"Well," said Lee, "of course I don't know. You're not meant to be so literal."

"Oh," said Constance, "all supposition, is it? You mean to say your fellow-theorists never challenge you? Oh, Lee, please don't let those Bolshevists hypnotize you!"

Lee was rather disappointed in Constance. She was knitting a ridiculously tiny sweater, and insisted on talking about how miraculously the little side room could be fitted up if the bassinet could be put endwise and the bath tub was one of those collapsible ones that fold up against the wall.

"Just come and see all my wee, funny, adorable little things!"

Of course it must be very exciting, but Lee thought Constance much less spiritual than of old. The afternoon had been surprisingly restful, nevertheless. Ian took Lee back

to the studio and left her on the threshold. Stepan was just coming out, and glowered at them both.

"Unmannerly mujik!" thought Ian. "I wonder if he's the sort that foregathers here."

Lee spent the time before she went to sleep that night arranging some counter-arguments to propose in case any one *should* challenge her theory.

III

"If you will see to these, *chérie,*" said Madame, "while I polish a little the samovar?"

She bestowed on Lee a bundle of blue candles. Lee sought out the numerous candlesticks that adorned the studio and began prying melted ends from them and thrusting in the new candles.

"And the incense," continued Madame. "Still there is some in that small tin near the tea-jar. If you will insert some in the burner?"

It was Madame's custom to set smoking an ancient silver censer suspended by three filigree chains from the ceiling on the occasion of a notable gathering of the clan.

"Many people come this afternoon," she explained to Lee. "One cannot always be solitary, eh?"

The everyday life of the studio could seldom be called solitary. But Madame's was a spirit which expanded among numbers.

This was to be an impartial collection of every one Madame knew, at once. Lee donned a gown of dull blue duvetyn pranked about with mist-gray symbols. She coiled her glimmering hair low around her head. Madame added to her attire earrings of lapis lazuli and silver.

"Complete!" she cried. "No, I do not want them, *chérie*. I wear now only pendent black circles, since a long time. It better fits my inner life, *voyons?*"

Lee found the earrings very uncomfortable, but at least was supported by the thought that she now lacked nothing as the picture Madame had tried to create.

Any number of people gathered in the studio that afternoon. Some of them had to sit on the window sills and the floor. Lee ensconced herself on a cushion in the corner beneath an ugly silver image and there remained for safety's sake. The blur of voices and the suffocating cloud of combined incense and cigarette smoke almost overcame her. Every now and then the talk would be half hushed, as some one lashed the piano into a swift, brief outpouring of music. There were calls for Liosha (the name had been quickly taken up) and she came and stood beside Stepan while he struck the first savage notes of one of his poignant lyrics.

"She will win the world for you yet, Stepan!"

"Don't be afraid to sing your soul out, Liosha!"

Advice and applause overlapped and swam together. Isabel Nutting, lean and agile, her red hair coiled at the nape of her neck, her citron-colored wool dress revealing the corners of her angular figure, leaped upon the piano stool as soon as Stepan had left it and began reciting her most recent poem. Her voice had no modulations; Lee thought her processes very interesting, but she was nevertheless glad to find again her corner and sit down cross-legged to listen or not, as she pleased. Soon a man's voice she had not heard before spoke above her.

"You were singing when I came in? Some of Stepan's rot?"

"Yes; but do you think it rot?" She raised her face to the direction of his voice.

"Mostly. May I sit down here?"

Usually the studio's guests asked no permission to sit anywhere and everywhere.

"Of course you may. There's nothing to sit on but the floor, however."

"All the better." His voice descended to her level. "You look so jolly sitting on it; the shadow-blue, you know, and just the glint on your earrings and on that damnably ugly little god above your head. I'm a painter, you see; things hit me that way."

"I'm a painter, you see; things hit me that way."

He sounded as if he knew what he was talking about, somehow. Lee ventured no tangible color theories.

"I know," she said. "My dearest friend is a painter."

"Indeed? Perhaps I know him. Is he one of the outfit?"

"It's a she. No, I don't think you'd know her. I don't know you, you see."

"I'm Robin," he stated, "Robin Andrews. Did I hear them call you Liosha?"

"That's a joke of Madame's. I'm really plain Lee Kelton."

"Not plain," he corrected her. "You've happened since I was here last month or so. Where did Koshka steal you?"

"I'm staying with her this season," Lee explained. "We're planning some recitals together."

"Hot stuff!" Robin Andrews commented. "You're living here, then?"

"Yes, if you call it living. We exist beautifully on tea and sardines and music."

Robin laughed. It was a young laugh. He struck his hands on his baggy tweed knees.

"Are you keen on pictures, Liosha?"

Lee hesitated. It was revealed to her in one vivid burst that he had no idea she could not see pictures. She had never been in an exactly similar situation. The humor of it and a certain luring sense of peril challenged her to play the game and keep up the illusion.

"Very keen," she answered him, which was partly true. Keen on Anne's descriptions of pictures would have been the accurate statement.

"Mine are mostly rancid," Robin confided. "Ideas are so infernally slippery! You can't hold them down with a paint brush, you know, long enough to look at them. That's what's the matter with most of the stuff we're all painting.

We just stick in the wriggling shadow of the idea with a couple of dabs and call it a go."

"It's quite as hard to cling to ideas in music," declared Lee, on safe ground.

"I suppose so. Stepan doesn't. That's why I say his stuff's rot. Don't let him browbeat you—I heard him trying to."

"I deserve it. I'm so stupid about his curious rhythms."

"You couldn't be. He's stupid to think it."

Madame Koshka's afternoon tea-parties always rambled on until almost any hour of night, and Robin Andrews regretted that on this occasion he could not stay till the last blue candle had guttered out, and Stepan Krysa had taken himself off.

"I promised a wildman I'd come and listen to a putrid play he's writing. I wouldn't have if I'd known Koshka had anything interesting."

"Has she?" Lee asked, turning to him a face of intent animation.

"Has she! Ye gods! Ye god," he amended, leveling a finger at the distorted silver image. "She sits there and asks me that! But I know now where to find you, Mademoiselle Liosha—otherwise plain Lee Kelton. May I find you again?"

"So far as I am aware," Lee said, "nobody is ever kicked out of the studio."

"True enough," Robin agreed. "*À bientôt,* then. I'm not nearly as silly as I look, by the way."

Lee retailed this admission a little later to Madame Koshka, and took the occasion to ask her how he did look. Madame pealed with her slightly grating laughter.

"Modest boy! A good, nice face, Liosha. Not strong—

no, not at all, but not silly. Hair the color of a lion skin, but what should that mean to you, *ma pauvre petite?* and eyes that linger as the painter's must, on beauty."

Lee hesitated, then confessed another fact.

"He doesn't know that I can't see. I bluffed, rather. Do you think it was no fair?"

"Oh, but I think it amusing! Bravo, little one! Robin is the one of all others to play such tricks with. His is the heart of a child. Oh, but I must tell all; it is too charming! *Ce brave Robin!*"

Before Lee could stop her, she had silenced her *monde* with a penetrating word, and enjoined them to keep the secret of the amusing game. They agreed, laughing, and Stepan leaned his great arms back across the piano and grinned silently until his brooding eyes half shut.

"How perfectly inane!" Lee thought. "Of course I shall tell him next time I see him. If there is a next time."

There was, and it came quite soon.

Lee was sitting on the windox-box seat investigating the progress of a bowl of Chinese lilies when Madame Koshka let Robin in. He greeted Madame briefly and banteringly and moved straight to Lee, who turned to him at once, her confession shaping itself in her mind.

"I don't wonder you've been looking out at it," he said; "a sky the color of delight! The old town does play happy tricks for us now and again."

"Indeed it does," Lee agreed, putting off the moment.

"I'm just from Baldric's studio," he told her. "You've met him here perhaps, yes? Such mad stuff as he does! He's painting in spheroids now; some insane idea of co-acting pulsations. I'm not so far gone."

Anne's technical jargon had never held any mention of co-acting pulsations. Lee thought she must be uninformed.

"Tell me about it," she begged him.

"Well, you know the pulsation you'd get, for instance, by looking at, say, that wonderful blue-green sky you've been watching. Well, then you paint it in a complementary saffron-red, and that sets up a reactionary pulsation that doubles back and gives you the blue-green mentally intensified. His idea is abysmal, but I hate his doing it in spheroids; that's what peeves me."

"It must be ghastly," said Lee, "to do it in spheroids."

"It is," Robin agreed mournfully. "He's wasting it. You must see some of his stuff one day. I feel you'll agree with me."

Madame Koshka was watching, apart, with narrow, amused eyes. She was most domestically employed in darning a stocking, while she smoked a long brown cigarette. The moment was still further put off. Lee felt, a little apprehensively, that she had let it go too long. She raced back mentally over her remarks and ascertained with relief that she had said nothing untrue. One of Anne's maxims relating to unspoken lies flickered across her mind, and she dismissed it. She had dismissed many others of late.

"I know I should agree with you," she told Robin.

She was tasting of stolen fruit, and it was passing sweet. In all her life, no matter how normally she had been treated, the knowledge of her blindness had tempered all relations with other people. Now she was being taken for granted, nothing adjusted, nothing withheld. She was to him a woman precisely as other women. It was not easy to contemplate speaking the words that would shatter the rela-

tionship; reduce it at a blow to one of the familiar forms, pity, or tolerance, or curiosity, or embarrassment.

"Of course I must, soon," she assured herself. "I couldn't keep it up, anyway. I'd be sure to do some fool thing and give myself away."

But nevertheless it was like a challenge when he asked her to sing.

"Not Stepan's bleatings; something with meat in it."

She sat motionless for a long moment constructing the room mentally with painstaking exactness. Then she rose and moved with measured nonchalance to the piano, rested her hand upon it and turned to him.

"What, then?" It gave her time to inwardly locate the piano bench.

"Anything else. You'd know."

She sat down with surety and ran her fingers in a trickling procession of notes over the keys.

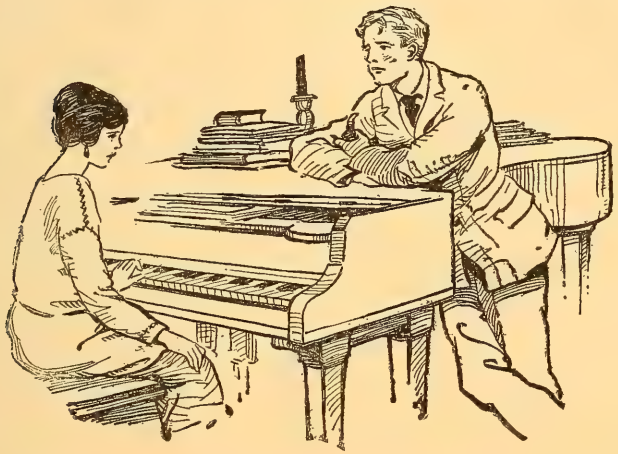
"I don't play the piano, really," she apologized. "And not by note at all," she added with an inspiration, forestalling possible future disaster in that direction. "You should ask Madame Koshka to accompany me."

"Oh, Koshka's ancient history," said Robin, thrusting out long legs and blowing through a well blackened pipe.

Lee sang an air from *Snégourotchka* and followed it in English with a song of Dargomijsky.

"Ye dear fleeting hours full of joy, yet how brief!
I think of you now in sorrow and anguish.
How glad were mine eyes with the joyance of seeing;
How high beat my heart for love in my breast!
Now speechless and still into darkness I stare,
No star lights my way, my heart lies in sorrow;
No star sends a ray to lighten my way,
My heart dies in sorrow. . . ."

The extraordinary aptness of the words struck her more forcibly than she had anticipated. The last adagio notes were almost inaudible. Robin came and leaned on the end



"You sing it as if your heart really was dying. . . ."

of the piano, thrusting aside a mound of music with his elbow.

"Good God! You sing it as if your heart really was dying in sorrow! Stepan would be green with rage; you don't do his stuff that way!"

This was the moment. Madame had gone out to the corner to purchase biscuits for tea. Lee played with the last chord of the accompaniment and braced herself.

"Don't look at me like that!" Robin said sharply. "It's frightening."

"I didn't mean to," Lee said truthfully, averting her head.

"It's abysmal," Robin pursued, using what seemed to be a favorite word. "Straight through me, and yet not at *me*

at all. As if—as if you were sizing up my aura, or something. Lord! If I could paint you! And yet Baldric tries to tackle such things with spheroids! Infernal fool! We all are. We can gibber all we please, but there are some things that can't be painted in thought symbols. Your eyes, for instance."

"Oh," said Lee faintly, "Robin Andrews—"

"Yes?" He was eager.

"Just—Robin Andrews," she said helplessly.

Madame entered with the bags of biscuits and bade Robin attend to the samovar instead of sprawling like a lazy lout on the piano. The moment had again passed, this time conclusively.

IV

She played the game with fierce, beating pride and found it temptingly, surprisingly easy. To lounge in dim corners, that was part of a pose; to command that he light her cigarette, that he brew the tea and bring it to her, on those occasions when they were alone, and pretend to watch him lazily from her seat, that only made him more a slave; to refuse walks with him, once on the grounds of a headache, again because she must practice with Stepan—those moments of apprehension were met successfully.

There was an element of mystery, of uncertainty, of something he did not understand, that fired Robin's imagination and lured him incomprehensibly.

"When you look at me," he told her, "it is terrible. Something happens to me! Those gray spaces—nothing, everything, there. It is like standing and looking down an abyss at the bottom of which unfathomable vapors of depth veil

the mysteries below, that no one may see. No, no, don't turn away! What are you thinking of, Liosha, when your eyes are windy gray spaces as terrible as eternity?"

"Of how silly you are, I dare say," Lee told him promptly.

Madame Koshka counseled, more or less. She shrugged her shoulders, shaking down her mass of blue-black hair across her cyclamen silk negligee and reaching for her hairbrush among a confusion of slippers, powder puffs, cigarette stubs, and bon-bons.

"It is a dangerous game you play, little one," she said, "but gallant. Why not, if it amuses you both?"

Lee was not sure that it amused her now. Fearfully, she still reiterated to herself that she must tell him before it should be less gently revealed to him. But she drew back again and yet again. Would it make a difference? There was the rub. It had made no difference to Anne; none, in a way, to Mrs. Plympton. But this was something else entirely. It was interesting, this being made men and women. It brought a new factor into every relation. It tempered every action, every unspoken thought. Would it make a difference—her telling him? He was so big, and eager, and ready to accept life whole. Yet, within, she knew that if he had known from the beginning, there would have been no beginning.

What of the ending? Of that Lee dared not think. More and more clearly it dawned upon her that Robin had actually fallen in love with her. If he continued to love her it must end, she supposed, in his wanting to marry her. She must tell him before that, and when she had told him, what would there be left? Lee dared look neither forward nor

back. She lived from moment to moment. The present was so perilously sweet that she caught it to her jealously. He loved life and beauty and his art and the perfection of truth; he loved the mystery of her eyes, the shadow of her hair, the whimsied gravity of her mouth, the elusiveness of her spirit that shone about her like an aureole. He told her all these things and she cherished them tremulously. Whether she loved him or not she did not know. She was too shadowed by the danger of the future to be sure. She was balanced on a pinnacle of elation from which the slightest touch might send her crashing into the abyss. The gods were, perhaps, cruelly kind, and coincidence abetted her cowardice that she might have no need of disillusioning Robin.

Lee's letters to Anne were few, and so noncommital that Anne formed no very clear picture of her present life.

"Dear Madame Koshka is very poor, you know," she wrote. "We live very simply."

"At any rate, that'll do her no harm," Anne reflected.

"We see a great many interesting people," Lee also wrote. "Of course a lot of them are perfectly insane, but it's rather thrilling to see them all groping after immense ideas in chaos. By the way, do you know anything about painting co-acting pulsations in spheroids?"

"I do *not*," Anne wrote back, "and neither do you."

Lee intimated likewise, in one of her infrequent communications, that the season was dead, and that she was working frightfully hard trying to put meat on the bones of Gavanelli's teachings.

(After the début, Mrs. Plympton had dispensed testily with Gavanelli, and told Lee that now her training was completed she was expected to go ahead and make good use of

what she had learned. Study, in Mrs. Plympton's mind, had quite definite boundaries. You studied, and then you stopped studying, and that was all there was to it. She certainly would not have classified as work Lee's fiery warblings in Madame Koshka's studio.)

"Gavanelli," wrote Lee, "all but ruined what voice I ever did have. You know he insisted on boosting it up and up till I wheeze like a penny whistle in my upper register now. If the musical world persists in turning a cold shoulder to me, I dare say I shall have to take to mops after all. Do you know, I believe Vonya is still at that loom? Poor child, I mean all the time to hunt her up, but somehow life is so full of other things!"

"I suppose I'm glad it's so full," thought Anne, putting away the letter.

V

Anne had, of late, been selling her soul to the growing genie of commercial art. The vast abyss of advertising swallowed her canvases at a rate she had never before dreamed of; they reappeared more or less recognizable as roadside lithographs and subway cards. Anne shuddered righteously and sighed over the swelling balance in her bank book. She had but to clap her hands and the genie appeared, powerful and ugly. Not thus had the pale-flaming goddess of art answered her humblest supplication. It was not for many scornful months that Anne discovered the fact that goddess and genie could walk hand in hand, unknown each to the other. The game of bringing them together, Anne played with growing skill and interest and respect.

She came hurriedly to New York early in March to nail

an account, and called up Madame Koshka's studio from Grand Central before going to meet her art director. Lee answered the telephone, and Anne rated herself for a middle-aged fool when her heart hurried at sound of the longed-for voice.

"How surprising! Why, what a lark!" Lee certainly sounded pleased. She was so sorry there wasn't room to put Anne up at the studio. She must come to tea. Couldn't they have dinner together, and take in Rachmaninoff if there was any hope of getting seats now? Anne would try to get seats; she was not far from Æolian Hall.

"Anne dear, such a bat! How nice to hear your voice! Four-thirty, then?"

Anne returned the receiver pensively to its hook and stepped out of the booth. Lee playing studio hostess amused and saddened her both.

She found the apartment later in the day. Its entrance steps, on one of the West Thirties, shot up darkly between a bizarre muffin shop and a tiny salon of select apparel. Anne walked up two dim and cushioned flights and knocked below a card which bore the name of Koshka in a flourishing foreign hand. There was a quick, familiar, hesitant step, and Lee herself opened the door and stood expectant, framed against a hazily golden background of sunshine on warm-toned hangings, hammered brass, and the glow of a pleasant coal fire in a crooked grate. It needed only Anne's tender monosyllable of recognition to change anticipation to certainty in Lee's face, and her arms went wide in welcome. She drew Anne within, found for her a much depressed wicker chair near the fireplace, and sat down herself on a window bench cunningly devised from a steamer trunk and a much-mended Persian rug. Lee was arrayed in

a rather unnecessarily effective tea-gown that threw Anne's useful traveling suit into sharp contrast. The silver and lazuli earrings were not lost upon Anne, and neither was the somewhat uneasily managed nonchalance of her child's manner.

The intrinsic shabbiness of the studio was well covered by a layer of color and exotic accessories. Anne's gaze, unfettered by any necessity of concealing it from her hostess, lingered on the swinging censers, the half-melted blue candles leaning at every conceivable angle from a variety of candlesticks, the open grand piano laden with tattered scores, the strange and hideous silver image that leered against a peacock blue hanging in a corner.

"Madame Koshka was so sorry she had to be out," Lee explained. "She'll not be in, I'm afraid, before we go to dinner."

"Oh, she's not dining with us? I'm sorry. I particularly wanted to meet her."

Perhaps Madame had guessed this, and particularly kept away. Lee looked slightly uncomfortable.

"I smoke," she announced suddenly, apropos of anything. "I'm afraid you'll be horrified."

It would have been nearer the truth if she had said, "I hope you'll be horrified." Disappointingly, Anne wasn't.

"Indeed?" she said. "So do I, at times."

"I never saw you," said Lee. "Why, how gay, Mamsy!"

"I suppose," Anne mused, "that I never did it when you were at home. Somehow, it wouldn't seem quite the thing to kiss you after I'd consumed a cigarette."

"Funny old Mamsy!" Lee laughed tolerantly, extending a lacquer box of coffee-colored Ivanoffs.

"Thanks," said Anne.

Lee's smoking was something of a farce. She missed the satisfaction of drifting with the languid spirals of blue which endears the pastime to some fair smokers, and it cannot be said that she particularly enjoyed the acrid reminder in her throat afterward.

"Do you like it?" Anne queried, holding a match.

"I adore it," said Lee.

"You look uncommonly silly doing it," Anne remarked.

Madame Koshka had told Lee that she looked intriguing doing it. It annoyed her extremely that she felt compelled to believe Anne rather than Madame. A flash of the old temper leaped out. She threw her cigarette violently into the fire.

"Good shot," Anne commented reflectively.

"You don't approve of me!" Lee cried.

"As you say of smoking, I adore you," said Anne.

"Now you're making fun of me!"

"Never that, my dear. I'm becoming a cynical old woman though."

"Anne! You never get any older."

"In some ways that's no compliment," Anne laughed, "if it intimates I'm no wiser. No, Lee, I'm past forty. Gray as a badger, soon."

She tossed her own cigarette into the fireplace and sat down beside Lee on the window bench.

"How are things going, my dear?"

"Gloriously!" said Lee, turning upon her a most convincing gray gaze. Anne had seen that arrogant tilt of the head too often not to know that something was amiss.

"I'm going home to-morrow noon," Anne said. "Want to come along?"

Lee drew in her breath quickly. "Oh, couldn't possibly,"

she laughed. "I'm fearfully busy. Marya and I are planning a joint recital."

"Marya?"

"Madame Koshka. She wants me to call her that. She says artists together are sister spirits."

"Indeed," Anne said. "I thought you wrote me that the season was flat."

"It is! We thought we'd stir it up. I dare say I wrote you before we planned it."

"I dare say. When is the recital to be?"

"Oh, we're not sure."

"Can you come home when it's over?"

"I may not have finished—some other things," Lee said.

"Oh," said Anne.

"I'm forgetting tea!" Lee cried, jumping up suddenly. "I'm getting quite expert at manipulating this beast single-handed." She moved to the samovar and took up the little kettle from its chimney. "Don't you think I'm quite an accomplished hostess?"

"You always were adaptable," Anne commented.

Lee pursued a slightly wavering course into some recess of another room where Anne could hear her rattling cups and drawing water. She returned with a tray held at a careful angle, and Anne, with unconscious habitude, kicked swiftly out of the way a footstool that lay in her path.

"Tell me when it gets too dark here for you, and we'll light up some candles. Electricity is so crude, I think."

"Do you?" Anne said, and then thought the remark unnecessary, for Lee crimsoned slowly.

"Mamsy, you must think I'm an idiot," she said, fumbling with the brazier of the samovar. "I—forgot it was you, just for a minute."

"I think you're a silly darling," said Anne.

"By the way, did you get your account, condensed milk or whatever it was?" Lee inquired abruptly.

"No, I didn't."

"Oh, Mamsy, that's dirty luck! And your trip all for nothing!"

"Mamsy, you must think I'm an idiot."

"Not for nothing when I've seen you. You'd better come home and console me."

"Two lumps, Anne? I can't remember." Lee, with tongs poised, gently stepped across the subject of home-coming. "Weren't you a duck to be able to nab the Rachmaninoff seats?"

They went out later into a green darkness bordered with a spread pattern of lights, and collided at the corner with a hurrying young man in a shapeless tweed overcoat.

"You!" he said fervently, and struck an ill-used hat from his rumpled hair. Lee turned to him a countenance of solicitude.

"We almost upset you!" she apologized.

"You always do upset me," he countered. "I was on my way to the studio."

"It's sad that we're on our way out of it," Lee regretted. "Anne, this is Mr. Andrews. He's a painter; you ought to hit it off. Miss Ramsey paints." She turned to the young man an animated face half revealed in the clinging dusk. "She's my firstest friend."

"Like Kipling's 'Binkie,'" Robin offered, and then thought himself very stupid, as Binkie was a puppy-dog. "Well, I'll go and see Koshka."

"She's out," Lee informed him.

"Hang!" said Robin. "I'll go dig out Stepan, then, and be wild. Will you be having tea tomorrow afternoon?"

Lee considered. Anne wondered if she were checking up train times.

"Yes, I shall."

"Unless I spirit her off to the wilds of New England," Anne put in.

"Miss Ramsey has an idea I'm working too hard, or playing too hard, or something," Lee explained blithely. "She seems to consider the claims of palpitantly waiting audiences negligible. Tea at five!" she called over her shoulder.

Halfway down the block she suddenly broke a silence by saying: "That's Robin." As if that was the whole story; which, indeed, it was. The words came in a low explosion as if they had been hovering, doubtful, behind her lips for some time.

"Ah!" said Anne.

"He paints—oh, I told you that, didn't I? Rather well, I believe. He's one of Marya's crowd. Herds of people are always coming in to tea. I'm so glad we were alone this afternoon."

"So am I," said Anne.

Fifty times during dinner, in a low-ceiled, smoke-filled room where Russian *borch* and *yeichneetsa* were served by girls in peasant blouses, a question hung on Anne's lips and was withheld, it seemed so preposterous. Once it almost slipped out.

"Does Robin know—"

"Know what?" said Lee, too quickly.

"—know Jack Bendish, I wonder?" Anne finished at random. "No, he wouldn't, of course—too young. Jack was studying at the League when I was."

The question would really have been, "Does Robin know that you can't see?" Oh, absurd! Why should she even suppose he didn't? It was perfectly natural that Lee should make more of an effort to seem completely normal with these new people than with the one who had guided her through dark years. And she carried it off uncommonly well. But there was an almost desperate strain in the effort. And Robin's last look—he had meant her to see it. Then Anne swept it all away as fantastic. It wasn't feasible, to begin with. Also, Lee had never been ashamed.

"Living's fun!" Lee stated above the coffee. "It's like a game, isn't it? I mean, different moves, and then waiting to see who'll move next."

"I've heard the simile before, it seems," Anne agreed.

"It's fun to be grown up," Lee added. "Think how old I am! What were you doing when you were my age, Anne?"

Anne considered. "Let's see. I was not much older than

you when I stood in a big, bare playroom watching a two-year-old somebody who couldn't remember anything but sitting in a high-chair, and who had just invented 'Mamsy' as a neat appellation for me."

Lee looked thoughtful. "Was it as much fun as all the things I'm doing?" she queried. "I'm afraid not."

"I liked it," said Anne briefly.

Rachmaninoff released Anne from her thoughts and she sank gratefully into waves of harmony and forgetfulness. Lee edified her in the intervals by technical comments and fervent assurances that Sergei Rachmaninoff was "priceless" and "abysmal."

"Such a bore for you to have to take me home," Lee complained, as they waited for the tide of Fifth Avenue to pause at Forty-second Street, afterward. "You'll be ghastly late at your hotel. Are you really stopping at the old 'Martha'? Adorable Mamsy!"

Anne had a guilty feeling that Lee thought it amusingly mid-Victorian of her to seek the companionship of the Martha Washington's feminine guests.

"It's a habit," she said. "Shall I see you tomorrow, child?"

"I'd love to! It's such a tiny glimpse of you. When are you leaving?"

"The two-forty. I was rather keen to see the new Academy; it opened today."

"Let's, then."

"It would bore you horribly, my dear. Nothing but pictures, you know. Probably bad, most of them."

"We could talk. I wouldn't be bored. Pick me up, please, Anne. At eleven?"

Anne agreed, touched a little that Lee wanted her. She saw her to the apartment door, where Lee stealthily inserted a latch-key "in case poor Marya is asleep." They kissed each other briefly, and Anne struck off for a bus. The night was singularly mild; she climbed to a seat on top and sat watching Fifth Avenue spill its silver pathway before her. Her thoughts jolted painfully like the bus. Lee was of age, she had not even a legal right to compel her to come home. Did Lee even think of the white house as home at all? "It's fun to be living!" Lee was living, and making her moves in the game eagerly. Well, that was all right. But if it should break her heart . . . Then Anne reflected that twenty-one is an age when that is rather common.

"There are all kinds of ways to have your heart broken," Anne mused. "But some ways are dangerous."

Lee was fresh and captivating next morning in a henna suit and a small dark hat with a gleam of copper-colored metallic silk twisted about it. Anne privately applauded Madame's ability as an adviser in matters of dress if not in the conduct of life. That lady was not to be seen.

"She never gets up till the middle of the morning," Lee explained. "Sometimes she sits and plays till two or three o'clock at night. She has to make up for that, of course. She's so intense! But she says that life just flows back over her when the physical part is inert."

"Oh, indeed," said Anne. "Do you stay in bed till eleven, too, and let life flow into you?"

"Oh, no," Lee admitted. "I generally roll out about nine, and stir up the breakfast. Marya adores the way I make the coffee. I bring it to her before she gets up. She calls me a bright being, sometimes in Russian."

"Do you understand it then?"

Lee confessed that she didn't.

"Then how do you know she isn't calling you a slow-poke? I used to."

"Priceless Mamsy!" cried Lee.

The Academy was a bit stupid. Anne found herself looking at all the pictures, good, bad, and indifferent, through a blur. She occasionally described one to Lee, who remarked, "How vibrant!" or "How quaint!" and Anne longed to box her adorable ears. There was something of a crowd; they escaped after a cursory tour of the rooms. Anne had a business appointment which cut out lunch, a vain attempt to soften the hearts of the condensed milk magnates. She

Anne longed to box her adorable ears.

took Lee back to the studio, where Madame Koshka was not, and found herself with no time for any lengthy parting.

"I can't *make* you come back with me, my dear," Anne

said, "and of course you can't break your professional dates. But I want you to let me know the minute you can come, even for a short time. Just a breathing-space, you know; a new angle."

"I know you aren't pleased, Mamsy," Lee hazarded. "But you've always wanted me to be successful, haven't you? I'm being so wonderfully successful for—for a person—"

"For a blind person," said Anne, and Lee flinched. "Yes, I hope you're successful. But now—I think I only want you not to be too unhappy."

"What *do* you mean? I'm wonderfully happy!"

"I'm glad. I wasn't sure that you were. I don't want you to be too happy, either, though that sounds absurd. Oh, dearest, I know you think I always preach at you. Perhaps I've been preaching at you all your life. And, Lee—don't be a bluffer."

"A bluffer?"

"Yes. It's silly, and it's dangerous. Good-by, dear heart. I'm thoroughly disappointed that I haven't met your Madame Koshka."

"So am I," said Lee half-heartedly. "Good-by, Mamsy dear!"

When Anne turned at the foot of the stair to look back, the door had closed. Of course. Why should Lee want to listen to the dwindling descent of her unwilling steps?

Surrounded once more by the gentle familiarity and security of the white house, Anne felt the glimpse of Lee in the Russian woman's studio to have been the exotic episode of a dream. And the more she thought of the intense Marya who allowed life to flow over her each morning till eleven

o'clock, the more she wished she might have seen this sister spirit of Lee's. Lee had impressed her as very young—younger than a year before, somehow—and pitifully laughable in her poses. She couldn't be taking such stuff seriously!

"What if she is in love with this Robin, even?" Anne mended the fire and leaned back to stare into it. "Why shouldn't she be? He seemed a nice enough, eager lad. I dare say he paints purple-edged vibrations instead of pictures, but she'd be none the wiser, my poor lamb. There's no reason why she shouldn't marry if he's wise and brave enough. If it would make her happy . . . If he realized and accepted. . . ."

A charred stick broke in two and plunged into the orange embers. Anne bent her forehead upon her closed hands.

"I believe it's all I've ever wanted for her—happiness. True happiness that comes from victory. I've been stern, but— Oh, my dear, my dear! From the first, when you commanded, 'Up-a-diddy'—when I gave you that little content against my heart—I've only wanted you to be happy. One can't help wanting people one loves to be happy . . . People one loves."

The fire sank to low hissing, dull and waning. A wind lifted without and beat against the white house.

"Go to bed, elderly idiot," said Anne, and arose to wind the clock and cover the sinking coals.

VI

That afternoon Robin had come to tea, as arranged. Some other people were there, and he sought Lee out where she sat alone leaning forward a little, hands clasped, perhaps

waiting for him. His greeting did not take her unaware, for she had heard his name called out as he entered, and she was ready for him with a lifted face of welcome.

"I saw you and your Miss Ramsey at the Academy this morning," he said. "Tried to catch you, but there was such a mob in the middle gallery on account of that silly thing of Marley's that you'd slipped out before I could get through."

"Sorry," said Lee, "I didn't see you," which at least was true.

"What did you think of it?"

She was not sure whether he meant the whole exhibition, or the silly thing of Marley's.

"I know so little about art. Miss Ramsey seemed to think it all rather dull."

"Bah!" he cried. "It's a benevolent institution for ancient and indigent Academicians! Those smug, sand-papered nudes; those fulsome, crocheted landscapes!"

"There was a little thing by some one named Evans that we thought rather nice," Lee ventured.

"The woman with the sun behind her or the kid with the parrakeet?" he wanted to know.

"The—the woman," Lee assured him, not at all certain of which one Anne had mentioned.

"It was amusing; I remember it. But tell me, what did you really think of Marley's thing? There's been such a hue and cry."

Lee felt the ground slipping. Anne had made no comment on the canvas in question, which she had privately thought distinctly unpleasant. Lee had no clew; she snatched at generalities.

"Can you wonder?" That would be safe, no matter from what cause the notoriety had sprung.

"Well, you can't wonder, considering the Academy. If it had been anywhere else, now! But it's coming it a bit strong for the old show!"

Lee felt more secure. "I must say, I can not care for that sort of thing," she said.

"I had an idea you wouldn't, Liosha," Robin murmured devotedly, and Lee breathed freely once more.

The date for the first of the Kelton-Koshka joint recitals of manuscript music was drawing near. The series was to be held at The Pint Pot, an improvised theater over a garage, where many new shoots of the drama had been sprouting of late. Even if none of the outer world should find its way in, a full attendance was assured of members of the initiated who would not hesitate to fling down their scant ducats that true art might be fostered. It is quite safe to surmise that Mrs. Plympton had never planned on any such flowering of her philanthropy, but the good lady was completely taken up with her dear Near Easterners, and, indeed, in the soothing surroundings of Amalfi, had more than half forgotten her little pet.

Lee rehearsed conscientiously, though she still did not understand Stepan's work, and feared his manner of mingled cajolery and fierceness. Most of all she feared his silences, when she knew not how he might be looking at her. And she wondered whether her voice would last indefinitely with the strain it was undergoing.

Robin had not been in evidence for much longer than usual. Lee found both relief and regret in his absence. Still, she wondered why he did not come. Had he learned the truth, and was scorning her with silence? She tried to put him out of her mind, and worked for Stepan without

resting, so that she might go to bed at night too weary to lie awake with anxiety and longing.

"No need to give all to Stepan," chided Madame Koshka. "You waste your voice, *ma petite*. Cherish it for the recital. Stepan has no thought; he will take too much your voice if you do not rest."

When Robin did come, at last, he was shining; all the more so to find Lee alone.

"I've been infernally busy. It has been hell, but out of the lonesomeness and the longing I think I've all the more got what I wanted. I've brought something to show you, Lee."

She grasped the edge of her chair nervously. This might be the hardest move of all. He was unwrapping something.

"I've worked on it like a fiend," he said soberly. "Yes, damn it, it *is* good. It wasn't all loneliness, Lee; it was like communing with a precious spirit to be making it!"

He held the picture, looking at it himself. He was elate; yes, it was good: the shadow-blue, the gleam of silver, the ringed symbols of light intricately woven behind the head —most of all, the dim, inscrutable, fathomless summons of the eyes. He looked at it in approval before he leaned it softly against the table leg in the best light. Then he knelt before her. She thought he must be holding it for her to see.

"It is very beautiful, Robin," she said slowly.

"But you haven't looked at it!" His voice was blank with disappointment.

The color sank from her face. She knew not where to look, where he had placed the picture. Her breath came quickly.

"Where is it?" she said, putting out her hand, and realized instantly the calamitous absurdity of the question.

He was stupefied. He stared at her. She was twisting

"It is very beautiful, Robin."

her hands together strangely; involuntarily she closed her eyes. Unbelieving in the midst of revelation, he sprang up with a choked, inarticulate sound and caught a magazine from the table.

"Do you care for this drawing of Benda's?" he asked in a high voice, holding out the magazine in an unsteady hand. She bent above it.

"I think it clever," she said faintly.

The page was open upon an article on ore-smelting.

"Oh, my God!" said Robin. "Tell me you are playing a trick, a joke! What are you doing this for, Lee?"

She had caught her face between her trembling hands.

"Yes, I have been playing a trick on you, Robin," she

gasped. "Oh, just for a little while—I so wanted all the barriers down. Forgive me. . . ." She sought him with uncertain hands, but he drew a little away.

"You've been living a lie to me," he breathed. "A lie. . . . You, Lee, you!"

"Robin, Robin—you'll forgive me?"

"Blind!" he cried out. "Blind! Blind!"

"The picture! Don't kill your picture!"

Each time the word cut her with a jagged streak of pain.

"My God," he whispered. "Oh, my God . . . my God!"

She thought he was crying. Then, in the sickening silence that had fallen, she heard the click of a knife opening; a harsh scream of the blade through fabric.

"Robin!" she cried, in surmise, "what are you doing? The picture! Oh, don't kill your picture!"

She stumbled to him, put her hands across the face of

the canvas. He could not all at once check the downward slash and cut her wrist before he could stop.

"I've hurt you," he said hoarsely.

"Oh, you have hurt me," she said, unaware of the blood that trickled across her palm. "It was wrong of me to lie. . . . But, Robin, is it so terrible—that I can't see?"

He stood looking at her. He had worshiped her in her perfection. Anything imperfect, incomplete, made a spiritual revulsion within him. He had poured out for her all his soul's treasure; his mind fled back over their talks; he found it incredible that all this should have been false. Understanding none of the tragedy of her little desperate battle to play the rôle of what life had denied her, he saw only his own devastated faith. So this was the enigma of those beautiful, baffling eyes! An abyss indeed, wherein the souls of men might fall and perish. He put his arm across his face that he might not see her.

"Yes—it is terrible," he said.

He caught up his hat from beside the samovar and rushed out, trembling.

"Robin!" Lee cried. "You don't understand!"

But the studio was empty. Ah, no; he didn't understand.

He knocked against Stepan Krysa at the bottom of the stairs. Stepan looked at Robin with his slow, sullen gaze, and then laughed silently.

"Ha, it has happened, I see! The game is at an end, eh?" he said.

Robin halted, quivering. "You knew it!" he cried in a thin, high voice. "You all knew it! You have tricked me, and lied—every one of you! Lied! Oh, Stepan, damn you! Damn you, Stepan . . ." and he ran sobbing down the dark hallway, plunging against the walls.

Stepan did not go on up to the studio. He went out into the street, laughing.

Lee lifted the picture from the floor and traced the two long cuts in the canvas. Blundering helplessly, all her schooled effort gone, she carried it to her bedroom alcove and put it at the bottom of her trunk. Then she sank across her cot and cried, sick to the depths of her being. She had not wept so bitterly since a time long gone, when she had lain on a bare linoleum floor all day and sobbed for despair of Willburg Institution.

Madame Koshka did not attempt to talk to Lee when she came in. She had met Stepan Krysa. She sat and played more softly than was her wont, and smoked many Ivanoffs. Later she parted the curtains of the alcove and looked in upon Lee.

"Pauvre petite!" she said kindly. "I warned you of the peril of the game, yes? It is no longer amusing, my Liosha. But life has always in store a replacement for what it breaks. I have found it so, and I am older than you, little one."

She received no answer, and, letting fall the tarnished black and gold curtains, she moved slowly to the piano again and stood looking at the keyboard without touching it.

VII

Lee knew quite well that it was no one's fault but her own. And because it was her fault she could ask no sympathy. She longed, at last, to sob out everything to Anne—Mamsy. She would understand and pity and comfort. But would she? Mamsy so detested falsehood, and Lee had been herself a falsehood these many weeks. Perhaps longer than that. Her memory crawled back slowly, wretchedly,

across all the poses of the last three years. Why had she hurt Mamsy by her arrogance and her silly superiority during that latest visit to the white house? It was all pride, false pride. She had been ashamed of her limitations, ashamed of her blunders, ashamed of being blind. False pride; and where had her pride and her posing brought her? To wretchedness such as she had never known before, and loathing of herself. Coward and liar: they weren't pretty words. Anne, who would have understood it all better than Lee, wouldn't have used them. But Lee lashed herself with them again and again, with a sort of numb satisfaction in their sting. Had Mamsy suspected this last and worst pose of all? She remembered those parting words: "And, Lee, don't be a bluffer. It's silly and dangerous." She had given Anne other cause for the admonition; she wryly remembered her remark about the crudeness of electricity. Had Mamsy's keen discernment pierced further? She prepared to write Anne a swaggering letter full of generalities, and ended by writing no letter at all.

Robin, in his jumbled little Chelsea studio, sat before his empty easel. If he had been like some men, he would have got consolingly drunk. Being Robin, he sat sunk in his old willow chair till the moon drifted above the skylight and traced the floor with bars of silver and shadow. But beauty was gone from the world for Robin just then. He brushed the moonlight from his staring eyes and bent his head upon his closed hands.

Strangely, with the heartbreak, came for Lee an odd release. There was no longer the agonizing need of straining every nerve and muscle to maintain the rôle. She might blunder and be blind. She found a strange, gentle consolation in return to blindness, and did not recognize it as self-

pity. With a curious defiant need of turning to her own kind for solace, she even sought out Vonya and spent an evening at the Organization's boarding-house. She moved like a creature from another world among the patient, unlighted workers, and, on her return, lay awake for shame at thought of the comfort their flattery had brought.

She told Stepan she couldn't give the recital—yet. Her nerves, she said, had been subjected to a strain, and she couldn't sing. She did look pale, but Stepan laughed his inaudible laugh.

"Ya!" said Stepan, "you will sing, little Liosha. All the better for a broken heart."

"My heart is not broken, not in the least," Lee told him sharply. "I will request you to leave it alone."

"She requests me to leave alone her heart!" mocked Stepan. "*Mahlcheete,* Koshka, hold your tongue! I have as good right to ask her to leave alone mine, then!"

"I have absolutely no intention of meddling with your heart or you," Lee said, with a flash of temper that was not feigned.

"Aie, aie!" cried Stepan. "I infuriate her!"

VIII

The recital happened, after all, on the appointed night. The Pint Pot was jammed, its low ceiling hidden by a violet cloud of tobacco smoke. The piano stood on the portable stage, taking up most of the space between straight curtains of cotton stuff tie-dyed in orange and amethyst. A strange flickering reflection trembled across the stage from the winking of a big electric sign outside. Money was piling up in the hammered brass saucepan that was being used as cash-

box at the door. A very few of the outer world did stray in mainly for the sake of adventure, but the bulk of the audience was made up of people who knew who Stepan Krysa was.

He sat sulkily on the edge of the platform during most of the performance, looking neither at the audience nor at Lee, but at his own boots. Lee was wearing the gown of tangerine velvet, and it robbed her of what little color she had. She looked like a white flame. She sang with defiant abandon; a devastating, heedless temerity. Her voice once shattered completely on a high note, but she laughed aloud—a little cool laugh—and swooped down to her lower register. And the audience snapped their fingers and applauded Stepan Krysa that he should have put that cynical laugh into the midst of his tragic lyric.

Madame had played herself into tatters. She had what she called a headache streaked with purple. She left the stage dramatically and went home in a taxi, while two things were yet to be sung.

"I will play the accompaniments," Stepan assured her, where she leaned twitching in one of the boarded dressing-rooms. "And I will bring the little one home. Fly, Koshka, to brandy and bed."

That the composer himself should accompany pleased the audience immensely. They trampled the floor and praised him in a number of languages. They put more money into the hammered brass saucepan. A newspaper man who had slunk in grinned and added a quirky symbol to a half-hidden note-book.

When it was all over, Stepan and Lee escaped down the back stairs that came out behind the building. He gave her scarcely time to pull on her wrap.

"They will bawl and contradict till midnight," he said. "Bah, I am in no mood for them."

Neither was Lee. Her head, too, was heavy.

"I'm afraid I messed up the *Légende,*" she said.

"No, no! It was in the *Légende* you triumphed. That laugh—it must now be part of the work. Remember."

"I laughed because I didn't care. My voice went all to pieces, and I didn't care. Some day my voice is going permanently to pieces."

"Faugh!" grunted Stepan. "Remember, now, never to care."

They had walked far, and Lee wondered if he meant to go

"You must take me home, Mr. Krysa."

afoot all the way. She was tired, and it was a distance usually covered by bus or subway. His pace slackened suddenly, and he went up a step. The instant Lee's foot

touched the edge of it she knew it was not the entrance of Madame Koshka's studio.

"Where is this?" she asked sharply. "I'm too tired to eat anything, Stepan, and it's too late."

"It is not to eat," he said. "We pass so close to my studio. Liosha, I have made a new little song—for you alone. You must hear it now while it rushes in my head."

"Not now," she begged. "I mustn't come in. You must take me home, Mr. Krysa."

"Mr. Krysa! That is too good!" He had almost forced her in through the hallway. "No, we shall sing it. Then I shall be princely and hire a taxi."

He put her into a hewn wooden chair and went to close the door of his studio.

"Listen, Liosha, how short it is. You must learn it now." He rasped a chair back from the piano and played the air through, then sang it in Russian in his negligible tenor.

"I am too tired," Lee begged again. "You must let me telephone for a taxi, Stepan."

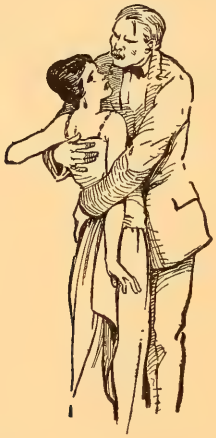
She had no idea where the telephone was, if he had one. She felt utterly helpless, and filled more than anything with a sick weariness. He moved toward her. His voice seemed to come from a great height.

"Liosha," he said, "I have been waiting a long time; waiting till that fool, *ce maudit Robin,* should play the coward." A step brought him nearer. "He it is who is blind—this imbecile. Liosha, do you think I care? You are muffled flame, you are a closed lily, you are—ah, *il est grand temps que tu mettes fin à toutes tes folies!* You are only blind if you refuse to see my love!"

"Hush, Stepan, oh, hush!" Lee cried. "You are entirely

mad! I never dreamed— You have been so harsh to me, always."

"To make you work. Fear of me gave you something. Love of me will give you more."



He kissed her, crushing down her words.

He caught her up from the chair. Her first thought was stupefaction at the bigness of him. Her illusions of the slight form to fit the thin voice melted into horror at the reality of his great shape. He kissed her, crushing down her words, leaving her inert, her head flung back away from him. Then she pushed him fiercely.

"I could never love you! I detest you! I think I always have. But I don't fear you. Is this your gratitude for my singing my voice out on your horrible songs? I shall never sing for you again—you understand that."

"You will sing for me," he said gently. "If you do *not*—" His arms tightened, his face approached hers. "Aie! But

what—you do not fear me, you say? No, you love me, Liosha, and you will sing my songs. Yes, I promise you, you need not fear me if you will sing them."

"Oh, I will sing them," Lee gasped. "If you can keep a bargain, I can. If you do not take me home now, I shall—"

What would she do; that was just it. But he released her.

"You will learn the little song—the little new song that is all for you and me."

"Stepan, I can't. I'm ill. It's in Russian; I can't learn it now."

He drew her powerfully to the piano and sang the song again and again.

"What does it mean?" she asked in a flat voice.

"It is for you; that life can be for you a great field of eternal night, filled with the chanting of stars."

"How romantic, Stepan," she said wanly. "If I can sing it now, will you let me go?"

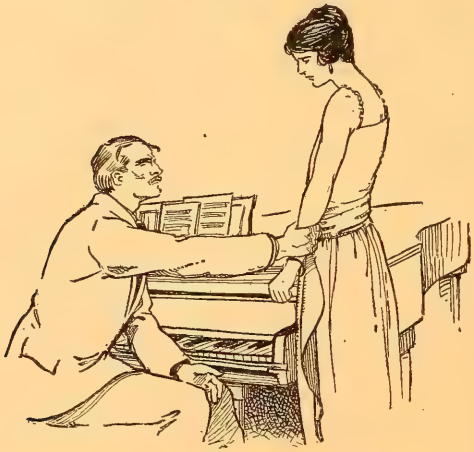
He made her sing it time after time, criticizing her pronunciation. The darkness swam before her; she leaned on the piano.

"Liosha, you are the dark of the moon; you are mystery and magic. Some day I shall snatch aside the veil that hides you from me!"

Poor little Lee! Anything but mysterious, she swayed shivering beside the piano. Everything of pose and affectation had dropped from her utterly. She wondered if she ought, perhaps, to pray—but all she could think of to say was, "Mamsy!" Stepan pulled her down to him on the piano chair; her elbow struck a discord sharply as she struggled away.

"Stepan, you promised! I will sing all your songs, every one. The new one, everything!"

He kissed her eyes, laughing. No one had ever kissed her eyes but Mamsy. Then she remembered that no one had ever kissed her at all but Mamsy; cold pecks of kindly acquaintances didn't count. Robin would have kissed her if everything had not been spoiled and shattered. She put



"Liosha—you are the dark of the moon!"

her hand over Stepan's mouth, and his mustache crushed under her fingers.

"Stepan, please, please!" she implored.

"It is such a timid little one! A flower growing in the dark—what could it know of the sun's passion? Yes, I will take you home, Liosha."

It was one o'clock when she let herself into Madame Koshka's studio. She bathed her burning face in cool water, then suddenly scrubbed it savagely as if to wash away Ste-

pan's kisses. She lay in bed stiff and shuddering, her brain beating with the dread of the night. Loathing filled her, loathing for Stepan, and Madame Koshka, and the silly, stamping audience at the Pint Pot. She thought of Robin, who, of course, had not been there, and new hatred of herself swept over her. If, to-morrow, she should write everything to Anne and ask to come home? She could not write everything to Anne. This was far worse than the early smashing of glass balls. Could Mamsy's compassion stretch so far? No, she could not write. She must stick, now, till the end. What was the end? She must sing Stepan's songs. If she did not— Would he keep his bargain if her voice went so that singing them was impossible? How hideously big he was! Why had she never realized before that the inconsiderable voice had come from such a tremendous form? With troubled sleep came again the memory of Anne's kisses upon her eyes. That had been a little ceremony—oh, so long ago—a lifetime ago. After she was tucked in bed, Mamsy would kiss first one closed eyelid, then the other, so that they would go to sleep. It had almost marked the boundary between day and night, then, for Lee. Oh, it was impossible to write to Mamsy.

IX

With Madame Koshka humming *Kalinka* and clattering breakfast cups, the night before seemed a dreadful dream. Madame's headache had mended, and she looked with some concern at Lee's white face and the deeper shadow below her eyes.

"Stepan works you too hard," she said. "When did you come last night? I was sleeping heavily from the medicine."

"He kept me a little to try a new song," Lee said, gulping her coffee.

"Stepan is a fool," Madame said decisively. "Eat now your toast, my little one. Fasting is an idiocy."

That afternoon people came in as usual. Lee pleaded fatigue and lay behind the black and gold curtains of her alcove listening to the chatter as to the far-off passing of a multitude. There was talk of the recital and its success. Lee realized stupidly that she had not even asked how much money they had made. Stepan put his head through the curtains and looked for a time at Lee with his dull, slowly-moving eyes.

"Come and sing your song, Liosha."

"Eat now your toast. Fasting is an idiocy."

She started violently at the nearness of his voice.

"I'm ill," she said, "and so tired. Please go away, Stepan. I haven't any voice; you used it up last night."

"We all wait," he said. "Come out, Liosha, and sing your song."

She rose unsteadily and came out with him. She wore her

"You remember it, the little new song?"

morning dress of dull green jersey, and her hair was disarranged.

"I must apologize," she said. "I'm not fit to be seen. It's Stepan's fault. He insists."

"You are always beautiful," said Stepan, and some one applauded. "You remember it, the new little song?" he asked.

Its few lines were burned sharply into her memory. She nodded, and he began to play. When she had sung the song, very simply and clearly, there was a bit of silence—then some applause and much laughter.

"Bravo, Stepan!" they cried. "You are stupendous! Ha, ha! You are original!"

Madame Koshka made an angry click with her tongue.

"I am very displeased," she cried. "My friends, our Stepan is a fool!"

Lee could understand none of it. She slipped away to her room with her glass of tea. Madame came in later, when there was silence beyond the curtains, and moved up and down.

"Stepan has played a dirty joke," she said rapidly. "I must tell you. The song you sang—you told every one that you were his. The song is hardly decent. I am very angry with Stepan."

Lee's fury was released. She had what Mrs. Darrah would have called, long ago, a tantrum, and concluded by sobbing in Madame's arms and beating her upon the shoulders with clenched, quivering hands.

"I have talked to Stepan," Madame Koshka told her. "Do not fear. I have always, up the sleeve, a weapon for Stepan. I think, now, he will be perhaps good. He is ashamed, though he laughs."

But Lee was more ashamed than Stepan.

He was, on the whole, fairly good. Lee implored Madame not to leave her alone in the studio. When he came, he stalked about and mingled cajolery with criticism. With a threat in every pressure of his hand he stood over Lee's singing, and work for the next recital of the series went forward with enforced smoothness.

Again and again Lee wondered why she submitted. If she were only free to run away and try all over again! The fetters of blindness tortured her. She might, of course, summon a taxi and go to the Organization, beg them to admit

her to the weaving-room and the boarding-house. Perhaps from Vonya she could learn patience and courage.

"I think blind people need to be taken care of," she thought, facing an unwelcome revelation. "Oh, *I* need to be taken care of!"

But she did not go to the Organization; she stayed on mechanically with Madame Koshka. Life in the guarded luxury of Mrs. Plympton's mansion had been a bore, but existence here in the exotic peril of the studio had become torture. Lee could never get out of hearing of the excited gabbling of these temperamental theorists who divided their time between dangerous banter and bombastic performances of their specialty. Lee, robbed of credulity, realized the shallow speciousness of their high-sounding thoughts, and blushed to think of the early parading of her silly trumped-up theory of color shapes. How could they find enough to talk about, night after night? All their wild, preposterous ideas seemed to her long ago outworn. They repeated themselves over and over and never grew weary. Isabel Nutting's poetry became more raw-edged, Leroy Nome's circles more eccentric, Stepan's music more discordant. Or so, at least, it seemed to Lee, poisoned and bemused by the whole atmosphere of this feverish, unreasonable existence. Perhaps Madame Koshka really possessed a little of the occult power she boasted, for Lee seemed hypnotized, unable to break away from the whirling, charmed circle.

She might have thrown herself on Constance's mercy, if she dared not face Anne, and Constance would have taken her in and made room for her in the little half-fitted nursery, where the bassinet and folding bathtub were not yet in use. She and Ian would have soothed and scolded and jol-

lied Lee back to courage and confidence and sent her home reassured to Mamsy. But it never entered Lee's bewildered head to appeal to Constance and Ian. They might as well have been in China, so far was their world removed from the all-pervading, ever-present, ever-menacing world of Stepan and the studio. A pitiful, foolish, frightened little martyr, Lee continued to sing Stepan's savage music for him, dominated by only one idea: that if she didn't, Stepan would claim her, as his unpleasant little song had intimated. So she worked for him meekly, and Madame Koshka smoked countless cigarettes and let her do it.

X

Anne had not heard from Lee for a long time. Her last letter had been brief and tired and uncommunicative. The new silence was even more disturbing. Neither did Anne altogether like the humorous account in a New York paper of a modern recital given in a playhouse called The Pint Pot.

"I'm free to confess I don't appreciate modern music," Anne told Spook, who was a new addition to the ménage of the white house in the shape of a smoke-gray ball of Persian kittenhood. "But if she likes it, who am I to tell her to stop singing it? It may be as new and true as radio, or Einstein, neither of which I understand, either."

Spook allowed a small portion of pink tongue to escape between his whiskers and gazed up at her with blue-eyed innocence.

"And where is Robin, Spook? It's almost time for him to materialize. It's May, and robins come in May."

The summer-sweeting tree was in bloom. Anne always thought both of her mother and of Lee when she saw the

starry petals floating. Of that birthday party when Lee was five and Anne was twenty-five. What was the tune the music box played? "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean." Angela Morton wore a pink sash. Now Angela Morton had just announced her engagement to Edward Stiles, Jr.

"Heigh-ho," said Anne, "that's quite natural. But we haven't finished our newspaper, Spooky."

"And where is Robin, Spook?"

She pulled her hat farther over her eyes and turned the paper away from the sun. An inner page held a notice that the *Olympic* was docking next day with notables aboard.

"Mrs. E. Stacey Plympton is among those returning, after a prolonged stay in Italy and the Near East, where she has been engaged in relief work."

"It doesn't mention the Brussels griffon," Anne confided to Spook. "How careless! I wonder if she'll remember our Lady Lea's existence."

Then the paper stiffened and shook in her hand. The sunlight shattered the page.

"Among other passengers is Mme. Stepan Krysa, who, it is said, has come to this country in consequence of a rumor linking the name of her husband, Stepan Krysa, a composer, to that of Miss Lee Kelton, a young singer who has been professionally connected with him. Mme. Krysa declined to discuss the matter with reporters."

The paper crumpled down to the grass. Spook thought he was intended to play with it, and made a ferocious fuzzy pounce, looking up saucer-eyed to see if he were admired. But his mistress was running across the garden to the white house with her hands oddly stretched before her.

"Oh, blind and deaf!" she cried inwardly. "Why didn't I answer my heart long ago?"

It was night when the worthy express that seemed to Anne so slow reached New York at last. She took a taxi to Madame Koshka's studio and climbed the two padded flights to the smudged white door. Madame Koshka—or a woman whom Anne supposed to be she—opened to her knock. Madame looked more *rusée* than was her wont; she had been battling all day with another purple headache, and her colorless face was splotched with the mauve shadows below her eyes. She clasped a crumpled negligee about her throat and stepped somewhat backward. Madame had feared little in her life, but she feared Anne's eyes.

"Where is Lee?" said Anne in a voice that she tried to keep level.

"Ah! You are the famous Mamsee!" Madame's face was contorted into a wry smile. "I must know at once it is you! Enter!"

"Is Lee here? I must see her." Anne had not meant her voice to sound so flat and harsh.

"She is not here. She is at The Pint Pot—*au théatre*. It is the last rehearsal. I too should be there. But I am indisposed, my head bursts in flashes."

"Who is with her? You let her go alone?"

"No, no! Isabel is with her, Isabel Nutting. A clever girl—oh, much older than your Lee. She pulsates poetry."

Anne felt strongly inclined to say she didn't care a damn what Isabel pulsated.

"Where is Stepan Krysa?"

Madame started a little. "Stepan too is at The Pint Pot. He accompanies her to-night."

"Love him? *Boje moï!* How she detests him!"

"Madame Koshka—you must tell me about Lee and this man."

"There is nothing to tell!" Madame looked shrewdly into

Anne's set face. "Ah, I have been angry with Stepan, Mademoiselle. He is a stupid fool. To hear his songs sung with passion—with heart-break—though it tear the voice out of her throat, so has he used her. Bah!"

"Does she love him?" Anne stood rigid and moveless, leaning against the doorpost. She would not come in.

"Love him? *Boje moï!* How she detests him! *Pauvre petite,* she does not know how to turn that she may find peace. She fears you, I know, Mamsee, that your pity and your forgiveness should not be large enough."

"Good Lord, nothing to forgive!" Anne breathed. "I've been an unspeakable fool. Madame Koshka, does Stepan Krysa knows that his wife arrives to-morrow on the *Olympic?"*

Madame started again. "No, he does not know it; but I know it."

"Ah, you saw the papers?"

"I have not seen the papers, but it was I who brought Stepan's wife."

"You brought her? What do you mean?"

"I have always the weapon, when Stepan becomes too much a fool, that the others do not know. I thought the time had come to use it, eh?"

"Madame Koshka," said Anne, "you are a good woman."

She might perhaps have said, "You are a better woman than I feared."

"Where is this Pint Pot?" she demanded sharply.

Madame told her. "Do not be afraid," she added. "It has been nothing: a threat that has kept our poor little one in submission, a few kisses perhaps. Stepan I know. Forgive me, Mademoiselle, that you find me *en déshabillé;* you will think me an ugly as well as a stupid woman."

But Anne was gone.

The Pint Pot was nearly empty. Only the stage was lighted, and on it two young men and a red-haired girl lounged beside the piano. The girl Anne rightly took to be Isabel Nutting. All three were smoking and one of the men was striking random discords on the piano. The flashing light of the electric sign without flickered and winked upon the group.

"Is Lee Kelton here?" Anne asked, coming so suddenly from the shadows that the three were startled.

"She is; somewhere around the roost," the girl vouchsafed. "She's been having a regular tantrum. Stepan went off in a passion."

"He tore a manuscript into uncountable fragments," said one of the youths with some awe.

"You'll find her somewhere around in the barracks," Isabel assured her.

"I thank you," said Anne. "I have come to take her home."

"That's my job," Miss Nutting said, snicking her cigarette butt neatly out the window.

"I shall be glad to relieve you of it," said Anne, and pushed open the door leading to the dressing-rooms.

She looked into three, before, as she swung open a door, a little gasp in the darkness of the fourth made her halt. Her hand found an electric button beside the doorway, and she flooded the room with light. Lee stood at the opposite side, and with the sharp click of the switch she backed up against the wall and spread her arms apart on the rough boards. She had on a straight, plain dress, carelessly adjusted, and her face was without color. Her eyes wandered ceaselessly like caged things.

"Isabel?" she said, in a hope that flickered out into the silence.

"Stepan!" she cried. "You promised! Why have you come back? Stepan, you promised!"

"Stepan—you promised! Why have you come back?"

Anne closed the door softly and put her back against it. Her head rushed with a drowning chaos.

"It isn't my fault," Lee was saying thinly. "Stepan, you know it isn't. I've tried so hard. My voice is gone—they've absolutely taken it . . . Gavanelli, the fool, and you. Nobody could cover that range, Stepan, *nobody!*"

Her voice was indeed strangled, shaken.

"I've kept my part of the bargain, Stepan . . ."

Anne pressed her hands over her bursting heart.

"Oh, my poor frightened baby!" she cried aloud.

Then she sprang forward—for Lee had fainted.

XI

Ludicrously enough, it was to the staid safety of the Martha Washington that Anne took her baby. Lee could not have borne the studio. Lying together in the big, cool bed, it was almost easy to sob out everything to Mamsy. But Mamsy made things easy always. And now that those dear, compassionate arms were safe around her, she wondered why she had not long ago taken courage to come to their shelter. She could not understand now her pitiful, preposterous loyalty to the circle of Madame Koshka and her friends.

"They must all have been possessed of the Evil Eye, I expect," Mamsy suggested, beginning to let gayety steal in. "I don't suppose anything will happen if you never show up for this concert at the Quart Measure. I have no scruples about removing you."

"I have no voice anyway," Lee quavered.

"Nonsense," Anne said, "you've been working it like a horse. It'll come back."

"They won't really care," Lee said, "if I were dead. I might have been if you hadn't come when you did."

"Rubbish!" said Anne.

"Mamsy," said Lee faintly, "do you think I'm branded?"

"Dear child!" Anne cried. "What *have* you been struggling with? You've been paddling around in a good bit of mud lately, but mud washes off, beloved, whereas brands stay put."

"How can you make things go away, Mamsy, the way you do?" Lee was quieted to still peace beside her. "Mamsy—you'll think I'm silly—but could you kiss my eyes to sleep the way you used to?"

LAST VERSE

Build It Up with Stone so Strong

I

ANNE unpacked Lee's trunk because its owner was supposed to do nothing much but lie around and be laughed at.

"Hello," Anne said, uncovering the back of a canvas that lay at the very bottom, "here's something I never expected to find in *your* trunk. But why the holes in it?"

Lee remembered suddenly what was in the bottom of the trunk and leaped from the long chair, spilling an outraged Spook.

"It's mine!" she cried. "Mamsy, are you looking at it? Oh, dear!"

Anne had turned it over, and, between the two long gashes, recognized the delineation of a beatified Lee, with light about her hair and the blankness translated into glory in her eyes.

"Who painted this, dearest?" she asked.

Lee hesitated, and then admitted, "Robin."

Anne had been waiting to hear something of Robin. She waited now. She looked steadfastly at the struggle going on in her child's face. Something apparently won, and Lee said:

"He brought it to show me. He cut it that way when he found out."

"Found out what?"

"That I couldn't see," Lee said in a small voice.

So Anne's preposterous surmise had been right.

"Poor Robin," she said, looking at the picture which told her everything now. "Poor Lee," she added very softly.

"No, I was so wrong," Lee said. "It was so easy, at first, and fun. It made me feel—oh, so powerful, Mamsy."

"Then afterwards it was not so much fun?"

"It is a picture of a dream and a belief."

"No. Mamsy, did you know it? Was that what you meant when you said, 'Don't be a bluffer'? I've so often wondered."

"I couldn't believe I knew," Anne said. "But I told you that on the chance."

"He was simply shattered," Lee said softly. "I think he must have hated things that weren't complete. He loved perfect things, I know."

"Did you love him, Lee?"

"I think I did," Lee said. "I was horribly unhappy. But then I was so much more unhappy afterward that I don't know. He was so eager—and big."

"If he wasn't big enough to let it make no difference, was he worth loving, dear heart?"

Lee came to Anne's side and put her hands on the picture, running her fingers slowly down the cut canvas.

"What is the picture of, Mamsy?" she asked shyly.

Anne looked at her. Then she did not know; had not even guessed? Anne felt her tears rising. She looked at the wistful fingers wandering over the canvas.

"It is a picture of a dream and a belief," she said gently.

II

The little brick porch at the side of the white house was always cool of an evening. Linden boughs sighed and crickets spun a small pattern of sound. Spook stalked them like an impalpable shadow, his blue eyes suddenly become luminous. Lee had just finished an attempt to sing a ballad, nobly supported by the remnants of the white house piano, and she joined Anne on the porch.

"Isn't it ghastly?" she said ruefully. "We're a pair, the piano and I!"

"It'll come back," Anne declared, making room for her on the old rattan settee. "That's far better than last time. Forget everything anybody ever taught you, and just sing the way you did once upon a time."

"It's a pretty lookout for my bread and butter," Lee sighed.

"I'll butter your bread just at present," Anne assured

her. "I have some to spare. And next season you shall don the gracious garments of an ancient day, and play the harpsichord, and sing ballads, the way I've *always* wanted you to. And everybody will grovel. And Madame Koshka won't be your manageress either."

"Who will be?"

"This aged woman. We'll bat around and try it on for a season. By that time the world will be yours. Then I can sit back in a diamond-studded studio and paint ads for Tiffany."

"Mamsy, you are too silly and adorable!"

They were sitting quietly, Anne's hand over Lee's. She never forgot the companionship of a touch in the darkness that Lee had often missed so cruelly.

"Mamsy, why haven't you ever got married?" It seemed to strike Lee for the first time.

"Well, there are just two answers to that, child. That nobody ever asked me—or that I wouldn't have him when he did."

"He must have asked you, you're so dear. Why wouldn't you have him?"

"Oh, you and your blarney!" Anne chided. She paused a moment. "Well, at first I was young and conscientious, and then I was older and unkind. Besides, Mother was ill—I couldn't leave her, and you were little."

"Did I make any difference?" Lee asked hastily.

"Not a bit."

But Lee knew Anne's voice too well. "I *did!* You would have married him! Oh, Mamsy!"

"No; I loved you more than him. I was unkind enough to tell him so."

"But if I hadn't *been* at all, if you hadn't had a chance of

loving me, you'd have married him. You'd have had your own daughter."

"If—if—if!" Anne laughed. "What would I want of any daughter but my Lady Lee?"

"Now who's blarneying?" But she was serious again at once. "Oh, Mamsy, you've given up—why, everything for me! Money, and time, and lots of your work, I know, and your own children!"

Tremendous things were rushings upon Lee all at once.

"Nonsense, silly one. I've just trotted along a step at a time. I've made so many mistakes, Lee."

"You've given me the biggest thing in the world," Lee said gravely.

"And what's the biggest thing, dear heart?"

"Friendship," said Lee unhesitatingly. "It's what we need most."

"We?"

"Blind people."

Anne was taken aback. With that "we" Lee linked herself definitely and acceptingly to a class. Anne had striven lifelong to keep her an individual. An individual she was —no doubting that—yet Anne, gazing at her in perplexity, could not but realize the bond with those others, the allegiance; a tie like that of race or nationality. Closer, perhaps, for it held a closer understanding of mutual need and failing. Closer than Anne, for all her devotion and her searching theory, could ever gain. There would be always that barrier between her and Lee, between her and Lee's fellows in blindness, greater in some ways than a difference in race or language, for Lee thought, really, in a language for which there could be no interpreter.

Yet it had all been infinitely worth while, this sacrifice of

Anne's. So, at least, she felt. She had tried to lay a foundation that storm and struggle would not shake. Other people had built too hastily upon it, and their erections had crashed about their own ears and, unfortunately, about Lee's. But there seemed to be left a firm fragment of the old structure, and on it they might build anew, this time for always. Anne's mind had gone far before she brought it back to the thread of Lee's talk.

"Some people say love is the greatest thing in the world," she said. "Haven't many people given you friendship, dearest?"

"No, only you. What I mean by friendship is so huge," Lee went on. "It *includes* love, and compassion, and belief, and understanding. Oh, everything that means the light of life. Most people just pity. It seems as if pity ought to be a comforting sort of thing, but it isn't, Mamsy. Why not, I wonder?"

"Perhaps because pity and patronage go hand in hand," Anne mused. "Pity is sympathy with imagination left out, you know. Pity is superiority; sympathy is equality."

"That's wonderfully true, Mamsy. It's sympathy and imagination *you* have, surely! And the hand on the shoulder. Oh, we do so need the hand on our shoulder," she added rather wistfully.

"I'm afraid mine hasn't been very steady," Anne said.

"I pushed it off," said Lee.

There was a little silence wherein Spook pursued imaginings with scuffles in the leaves.

"Poor little Jill Peters!" Lee said suddenly. "Do you remember her at Willburg, Mamsy? She clung to me all the time. I hear from her now and then. She's married a blind man and moved to Nashville. He has a little news stand."

"Is she happy?"

"I don't think so. It's an awful pity, Mamsy—no windows. I was thinking of Jill, with no hand on her shoulder. And poor Vonya—she'll be at that loom till she dies, I suppose. Just that loom, and those gossiping, bitter women every evening, rocking and rocking, empty-handed."

"Vonya has a wonderful smile," Anne said. "Don't you think perhaps she's happier than you've been?"

"Oh, no, no! And not happier than I'm going to be. It's funny how I've been thinking of Vonya and Jill and those people tonight. I haven't thought of them for ages. I didn't have time to think of *anything* but myself, and how frightened and tired I was. It seemed like years. I've been so naughty, *always,* Mamsy!" she added in a small voice. "How could you keep on believing I meant to be good?"

"Once upon a time," said Anne, "when you were all of four, you said, 'I won't!' and then, before I had time to remonstrate, you added, 'I'm sorry; I don't *want* to say "I won't!" ' You've been silly sometimes, dearest, and made mistakes, but you have never really wanted to say, 'I won't!' "

"Sometimes," Lee said.

"I've been stupid. And perhaps lots of things would have been different if we'd had heaps of money like Mrs. Plympton."

"Her!" said Lee. "But I found out things. Perhaps I needed to. Perhaps, if I'd just been always here at the white house, I wouldn't be so heavenly thankful to be here now. Oh, that sounds horrid, Mamsy, as if I shouldn't have been grateful."

"I understand," Anne said.

Lee slid down beside the settee, put her hands on Anne's

lap and her cheek upon them. Anne smoothed the shimmering coil of hair in silence. The small night noises stirred and passed and stirred again, and little Spook pretended he had found an important mouse among the shadowy poppies. Lee's face was introspective and dreamy; her beauty shone dimly in the half-revealing light.

"Mamsy," she said, and waited, like a child, for Anne's reassuring answer before she went on, hesitantly. "I never told you about my brother coming."

"I knew."

Lee started upright. "How could you? You didn't say anything!"

"Mrs. Plympton informed me, rather peevishly. You apparently wanted to deal with it alone, so I had to let you. But I wanted you, darling."

"Oh," Lee said, "I hated the way she almost threw money at him and hushed him up and hurried him off. He was so frightened, and I think he really did want to see me. But it was all dreadful." After a little pause she said, "Mamsy, do you think I ought to do something about them? He said my father was ill. Ought I to go down there and help, or make money for them, or something?"

It had always filled Anne with fury to think of the debt Lee's forbears owed her, which it was beyond any one's power to pay. She controlled her voice with difficulty.

"I cannot feel that you owe them anything," she said firmly. She looked down in the glimmering dusk at the profile that Lee had not inherited from John Henry Kelton. "I think," Anne said, "that your mother would have understood."

Lee sometimes wondered about her mother. Wondered dimly what would have happened had she lived. Would it

have been a lifetime there on the mountain? Perhaps Willburg for years—and what then? Certainly there would not have been Mamsy. That was unthinkable, now. Oh, how strange were the twists and turns in the trail of destiny that

Anne's memory fled back across the years of Lee's life.

brought two spirits within hail! She nestled her cheek closer against her cupped hands, and there appeared suddenly across her nose a silly, bewitching wrinkle. The expression that Anne adored and had not seen for long flickered into the corners of her mouth.

"Sing to me, Mamsy."

Anne laughed aloud. "She has made her bow at Æolian, not to speak of the Pint Pot, and dares ask this old lady to sing!"

"Oh, please! The sleepy way—I haven't forgotten. Sing 'London Bridge.'"

"My dear," said Anne. "My life."

Anne's memory fled back across all the years of Lee's life to when there had been just one small warm armful of her, drowsy-curled at bedtime, with wistful, wandering gaze straying across the dark and adorable mouth shaping a kiss for Mamsy. The kiss would be very stealthily deposited with the shadowy lightness of a zephyr, followed by a chuckle of "Did you fink dat was a bunny what kissed you? Well, it was me!" Anne made a sound of tender, reminiscent amusement, and the lovely grown-up Lee stirred at her knee.

"Please do sing! Or else tell me the joke."
"I'm the joke," said Anne. "Dear heart."

" 'London Bridge is broken down . . .' "

Heigh-ho—twenty years. That was a long time. Well, not so long, perhaps, for the building of a foundation. That was all it was—a foundation. Now life could begin, clear and strong and unfettered. Lee felt for Mamsy's hand and held it against her cheek.

" 'Build it up with stone so strong—
(Dance over, my Ladye Lea!)
Aye, 't will last for ages long—
(With a gay ladye!)' "

"My dear," said Anne, almost inaudibly. "My life . . ."

THE END

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